

METHOD IN ETHICS.

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by

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Preface.

The more usual course for a prospective Doctor of Philosophy to follow in pursuing his researches is to undertake some form of historical investigation, - an exposition of the views of some little-known philosopher, a long or short history of the treatment of some typical philosophical problem, a translation into plain English of the theories of some difficult philosopher on some subject or subjects, a gathering together of views on a subject which a philosopher has mentioned in many places, but never pointedly discussed, or a conjecture as to what he must have thought about some subject which he did not explicitly mention. All these require some measure of independent philosophising, even if the problem or problems in question are not merely re-presented but also discussed, because one cannot sort out the relevant from the irrelevant material, without oneself having a solid understanding of the issue. And presumably at least one of the criteria for judging such a product would be whether the selection of material displayed any consistent and intelligible grasp of the problem.

The pages which follow are the result of a considerably more ambitious undertaking than any of these, -

an attempted independent philosophical investigation. I now experience some regrets, that I did not content myself with something more modest. On the one hand I have come to see the point of the solid scholarship which the more conventional type of thesis at its best represents, and on the other I have found out that my talents do not appear to be quite commensurate with the pretensions of my undertaking. Some of the loose ends which the reader will discover are so because one must limit the discussion somehow, and there are some things which I have chosen to exclude. But I must confess they cannot all be justified in this way. Apart from the problems I do not even recognize, there are many issues which I know I should discuss, but to which I cannot at present see any clear solution; and there are many views which I have expressed which I know are unclear, or open to the most serious doubts. And yet I cannot at present find ways of making them clearer, or of resolving such doubts. One of my most chronic ailments is a constitutional inability to even conceive of moral philosophy as not being in some sense morally enlightening. It is not merely that I disagree with alternative views: I cannot even suggest what they might be, no less offer a defence of them. This strain will be discernible throughout, and particularly in Chapter Three. I am also seriously dissatisfied with the contents of my last chapter.

In view of all this, one might well expect that I should withdraw the thing - do something else instead, or wait for a day when I see things more clearly. My justification for rejecting this very proper suggestion is partly that I think the problem I am attacking is so important, and so little discussed that any treatment of it is better than none at all, partly that there are many things I have said of which I am entirely confident, and partly that even in the case of those things with which I am dissatisfied, my dissatisfaction nowhere approaches the critical point where I seriously suspect that I am quite wrong. I have a continuing conviction that I am at any rate on the right path. This is of course small assurance to offer anyone else, but to me it is quite significant, because I have so often seen the folly of ways which I had once embraced with the warmest conviction; and whereas other ideas have endured for weeks or months, the present point of view has survived half my philosophical career.

I would like to make a few remarks about terminology. The only deliberately technical usage which I am aware of having adopted is that I have used the words 'ethics' and 'ethical' to refer to philosophical activities concerning morality, and the words 'moral', 'morals', 'morality', to refer to moral experience or the moral life, including ordinary direct thinking about moral problems.

Thus when I speak of e.g. moral thinking, I mean not the kind of thing that goes on in philosophy, but the kind of thing that goes on in practice. But this choice of words should not be taken to express any view about the relation between philosophy and moral experience. Had I discussed this relation (which I did not - perhaps I should have), I should have felt as free to come to the conclusion that there was no difference, as that there was no relation, or any of the possibilities lying between. (But though I did not systematically discuss this question, my views about it may be seen, particularly in Chapters Three and Four.)

Apart from this usage, I have chosen words as the occasion demanded, trying on the one hand to depart as little as possible from common English, and on the other, where it was necessary so to depart, to employ the common philosophical usage in preference to the more special and technical philosophical terminology. In common, I presume, with most other philosophers, I have often been forced to use a variety of words or phrases for the same idea, in the interest of an agreeable prose style, and while the alternate words are not always perfectly apt, one expects that the appropriate substitutions will be made by the reader.

Upon re-reading my first two chapters, I find that

I have used the words 'clarity' and 'unclear' to refer to such a diversity of things that it may be wondered whether there is any common element. I think if I define an 'unclear statement' as any statement which has logical tendencies to confuse, mislead or perplex, this difficulty may be relieved. By the use of the word 'logical' here, I mean to exclude such tendencies where they arise from laziness, stupidity, perversity or other idiosyncrasy on the part of the person confused, misled or perplexed; - or to put it positively, I mean that a statement has no 'logical tendencies to confuse etc.', where it is in principle possible to be reasonably confident that one has understood the author's intention, or that communication has occurred.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor Macmurray for the patience with which he endured the hectic and woolly expressions of the early phases of my struggle with the problem, and for his restraint in not saying the cruel things which he would have been entirely justified in saying, and which would almost certainly have discouraged any further progress; and to Edinburgh University for the grant of a "Studentship", without which, both financially and psychologically, I should probably not have been able to get on with the job.

Introduction.

The problem of method, - briefly, of what to do and how to go about doing it, - is the ultimate question in moral philosophy. This may sound surprising to those who have always heard that the ultimate problem is that of defining 'the good', or answering the question, 'What is the good life?', or of convincing people that they should eschew evil. But the very multiplicity of these views should tell us that none of them defines the ultimate problem. The business of deciding between them is at least more ultimate than the business of attacking the problem they pose.

The problem of method is not ultimate in the sense that one first decides what to do, and then does it: one could not decide about any given project without trying it for a bit, and seeing how it worked out. And as a matter of intellectual history, it is probably only through doing various kinds of moral theory that the criteria by which one would decide between them would ever emerge. We could not sit down before all experience of moral theorising and decide, by what criteria we would decide which was good theory and which not.

But if the criteria thus in some way emerge from the practise of philosophy, still they do not depend logically upon it, while what we will accept after the criteria emerge will depend logically on those criteria, whatever they may be. This is the sense in which the problem of method is ultimate.

In spite of this, the questions what to do and how to do it have never to my knowledge been systematically discussed in ethics. This is not to say that philosophers have not in fact thought about them. There is ample evidence that they have. Much of Socrates' behaviour in the early Dialogues can be regarded as an indirect meditation on the subject of method. His "ignorance" can be interpreted as an expression of the opinion that casuistry is not a proper philosophical aim; and in Republic, Book I we see one of his reasons for thinking this, - that anything one attempts to say casuistically requires such endless qualification, even as an expression of a given person's moral outlook, that one can never attain that degree of precision that a philosopher demands (or should demand), before he will say that he 'knows'. Aristotle can be seen as disagreeing with these lofty scruples, and as making it a matter of principle to overlook question-begging arguments, and to remain content with vague, imprecise and misleading propositions. Kant, with

his rejection of the Aristotelian method of arguing from opinions*, and his insistence that moral principles are to be found 'in pure rational concepts only', re-affirms Socrates' scruples, but without his academic scepticism; and Hegel agrees with Kant that there must be something logical or universal about philosophical pronouncements concerning morals, but pursues the method of discovering these bit by bit through a phenomenological analysis of moral experience. Moore's discussion of the "naturalistic fallacy" is a small meditation on ethical method, but the rest of what he has to say shows little evidence that he explored the subject much further; and Ross and the many modern philosophers who use common opinions as a 'datum' return to Aristotle with a logical perversity which could not come naturally, and must be regarded as the fruit of some brooding about method. The questions asked and answered by people who analyse moral language are so sophisticated that they must proceed either from elaborate think-

* See Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals, 31: "Nor could anything be more fatal to morality than that we should wish to derive it from examples. For every example of it that is set before me must be first itself tested by principles of morality, whether it is worthy to serve as an original example." (Abbott translation.) It makes no difference if for the word 'examples' we substitute the word 'opinions'. - See also Kant's more vehement remarks on the following page.

ing about what to do, or from fine training. But again we are never given an account of why this, and not something else is the thing to do. People just do it.

Because of the dearth of overt discussion of method, I propose to offer what may pass as at least the beginning of a systematic treatment of the matter, in the hope that it may thereby become less a thing of deep feeling, stubbornness and mutual suspicion. Two broad methods of approach suggest themselves. The first is to sort out into as few distinct methods as possible the existing ways of doing ethics, and then in whatever way one can, compare the merits of these, with a view either to discovering which on the whole is best, or, putting together the lessons gained from the study, formulating some new method having as far as possible all the advantages and none of the disadvantages.

To do this would have two obvious merits: (i) through having things to say directly about every philosopher's way of doing business, it would promise to be more persuasive than any other, because if you can directly show a man that he is mistaken, he is much more likely to come to agree with you than if you leave his existing views relatively unmolested. And (ii), if it were conscientiously done, it would enjoy more prospect than

other methods, of encountering and coming to grips with all the subtleties and difficulties of the problem. From the intellectual isolation of one's armchair it is not only easy, it is almost bound to happen, that one will over-simplify difficult problems, - not dishonestly, as the word over-simplify suggests (I could not find a better phrase), but through failing to encounter or realize the complexities.

But the disadvantages are not inconsiderable. The most obvious in this instance is that in view of the traditional reticence of philosophers about method, it becomes a matter of conjecture and even suspicion, what the existing methods are.* And even if this were not a difficulty, there is always a very large element of falsification in the reduction of complex philosophical phenomena to a limited number of types; and this is particularly distressing when the discussion of the type is taken as at the same time a discussion of all the members of the type, - members whose differences may at times be as great as their similarities, and often more significant. The third difficulty is that there is a tendency for a conscientious theorist to get into those peculiarly infuriating Arguments

* And here may be as good a place as any to apologize for the dark suspicions I have in many places expressed as to the private but important thoughts of other philosophers.

With Men Who Are Not There. If we could criticise a type of theory and leave it at that, this problem would not arise. But we are sometimes honest enough to think of possible replies to our criticisms, or slight modifications of the view in question which would make the criticism inapplicable. Then of course we must ourselves reply to the reply, and if we are decent, give the chap who is Not There a chance to reply to our reply, and so on. One cannot presume to have disposed of the Absentee's method until one has exhausted, not only everything which might be said for it, but all reasonable variations of it; and in view of the immensity of human ingenuity it is quite impossible to know when to call a halt.

Finally, this approach seems to presuppose some sort of critical apparatus which would be outside its actual terms, - or at least it does to the extent that one can say that it is not possible fruitfully to conduct a discussion such as this without a settled idea beforehand of where the argument is leading; - and it might therefore be more to the point simply to expound this idea and explain what can be said in its favour.

The other broad method of attack is the 'clean sheet' approach, where one sets aside all actual views on the matter, and goes about building up the elements of a

problem, in as much complexity as seems fair or necessary, and then traces a path through the elements which seems to do ample justice to all sides of the problem.

This too has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are (i) that it makes possible a greater degree of organization of the material than the more historical method, which is forced to take the material pretty much as it comes; (ii) it allows one to reduce the problem to its simplest and most genuine terms without incurring charges of historical falsification, and frees one both from the profitless necessity of discussing odd, perverse and over-sophisticated views merely because they happen to exist, and from the temptation to get into arguments with People Who Are Not There; and (iii) being a direct exposition of the author's views, it has not the air of pretense which we found in the final objection to the former approach.

But equally there are dangers. There is the danger that the problem is not in fact nearly as simple as it is represented as being; that the material may be chosen and arranged only with a view to making the solution sound plausible; and that, through being so divorced from all actual alternatives, the solution offered will be some strange thing, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with what anyone else thinks, a solution to nobody's

problem.

But I think these are dangers rather than difficulties. A given instance of this approach might display all these tendencies, and might equally display none of them. As I said at the beginning, it is doubtless not possible to discuss such a problem as this without an actual acquaintance with its history; but if one's systematic discussion must in fact grow out of the history of the thing, it does not follow that one must directly demonstrate one's historical knowledge (i.e. by discussing alternative views), as long as one's acquaintance with the problem is in any event evident from what one does say.

I shall therefore follow the latter method. Another way of putting my general question is 'What is moral philosophy?', - but since this has a tendency to suggest that it could be answered either by reference to some Idea of philosophy 'laid up' somewhere, by which the practise of philosophers will ultimately be judged, - or by reference to what philosophers in fact do and have done, - it would perhaps be better to re-word the question to read 'What ought philosophy to be?', or 'In what way would it be most reasonable to conceive the nature of philosophy?'. By this I do not mean to preclude the possibility that there may in fact be an 'Idea' of it. I could quite cheerfully accept this view, as long as it

was not taken to imply that the way to find out what this Idea is has anything in common with the ways in which we would ascertain the truth about other existing phenomena, - atoms, for example, or events in the past, tables in the next room, mountains on the other side of the moon or ideas in other people's minds. If there were such an Idea, I suppose the only analogy it would bear to common experience would be that of a 'quiz show', in which the panel of experts were told by the master of ceremonies, 'I am thinking of an Idea. I have called it 'Philosophy', but I would not advise you to draw any inferences from its name, except that it is something quite distinct from all my other ideas. The only other clue I can offer you is that this and all my other ideas, both individually and taken together are entirely reasonable. I will answer no questions about it, and even if you do get the right answer I will give no sign whatsoever that this is the case. But don't think that I will not know how well your conjectures are proceeding. Because I will.' Except to the extent that one might become excessively self-conscious about the knowing gaze of the master of ceremonies, I think that this depicts an entirely healthy and appropriate atmosphere in which to conduct philosophical discussions, - and in this sense I suppose I am a Platonist. And I think it is worth mentioning that it is quite

irrelevant under the circumstances whether the matter of ceremonies or his Idea does actually exist, since one is not invited to discover the Idea by any of the methods appropriate to finding out about existing things, - by quizzing the M.C., or by watching his facial expressions as you discuss the matter, or by fitting him up with electrodes or any other gadgets ingenuity may devise. The panel's thinking is carried on entirely as if he did not exist, except in one respect: that there hangs over the discussion a prospect of being right or wrong. And without this I am unable to see how one could do any serious thinking whatever.

But this is of small moment, perhaps. It is interesting, though, that discussions of the sort I am engaged in are neither empirical nor 'a priori',* and yet people do change their minds about them, adopt new ways as improvements, and criticise others as being naive, muddled, foolish or mistaken. Since the question what philosophy is is plainly logically more ultimate than anything which is said as philosophy, it would be sad if we had to say that the answers to it were governed by emotion, chance, tradition or anything else which was merely arbitrary or non-rational.

What then are the criteria for settling such questions? I regret I cannot answer this in any general way, - but I

* i.e. derivable from analysis of the concepts used.

can make some remarks about how they may be discussed, beyond what I have already said. In the first place I suppose I cannot fail to say that the way to do it is the way I am about to do, since if I thought some other way was better, I should of course do it that way.

But this is not very enlightening, and there are some more informative things I can say. I can say that my discussion is based on my own experience of ethical theorising. I have been engaged over a considerable period of time in trying to do moral philosophy, and in the process have changed my mind more than once about how it should be done. Particularly at first, I did not always clearly recognize the reasons for making such changes, nor was I altogether conscious of what exactly I had been trying to do, or of what I was proposing to do in its place. I just had an uneasy feeling that there was something fundamentally wrong; and when I started performing in a different way, I felt less uneasy. But as time passed I became more precise about these things, and was also able to look back and see what I had been trying to do, what had been bothering me, what I next tried, why I found this more satisfactory, etc. I do not now think either that all the changes were improvements, or that on all the occasions on which I was 'bothered', I really need have been. But I do now know what stages I passed

and so forth/

through, what reasons I had for making the changes I did make, what view I now hold and what considerations induced me to adopt it, and also (or so I now think), which of my past botherments were well-taken and which were not, and why.

These are the resources upon which I think one must draw in a discussion of this sort, and it is in this sense that I think the discussion must be based on one's own experience. What one must do is to present as plainly, lucidly, candidly and systematically as possible the considerations which have in fact induced one to adopt the views one has in fact adopted, attempting to make public their convincingness by displaying as well as possible whatever logic or rationality they possess; - and where it seems enlightening to do so, discussing alternative views, bringing out the attractiveness or plausibility which makes them worth discussing, and alleging whatever criticisms appear instructive. If the things one finds plausible but mistaken, or the things one finds convincing happen to be represented in the history of philosophy, it may be advantageous to refer to them, both because of the general interest attaching to well-known theories, and also because their familiarity is an aid to communication. One's own ideas are often strange and difficult to express. But if there is any necessity to make any

reference to the history of philosophy, it derives solely from the fact that what one says to the philosophic public can be expected to be of interest to them, and their primary interest can be assumed to be that of finding some reasonable way through, some acceptable untangling of, the problems that the corpus of philosophers has worried about. One is often inclined to ask on hearing some new theory, 'Yes but why do you tell us about it? Whose problem does it solve? With whom does it disagree?' . And it seems to me that where there is no answer to these questions, the only possible response to the theory is a shrug of the shoulders.

It is perhaps an odd view that a thesis in philosophy is in some sense autobiographical, - and yet it would be just as odd if it were otherwise. The reason it seems strange is partly that we need to think that our ideas are not merely personal, idiosyncratic; and we advance them not only as being of general interest, but as being of such a nature that we can expect people, if not to agree with them, at least to accord them their serious consideration. And it is partly that the interest of what we say is presumed to lie, not in ourselves, but in our ideas. This is not to assume as a fact that people are not interested in us personally, - they may well be. But their interest in the ideas we are discussing is

something else again; and in order not to confuse matters, we must keep the two quite separate. These considerations make, and always have made certain demands on our way of talking, with which I do not wish to tamper. They demand that we talk about the matters under discussion, not about ourselves.

But on the other hand it would be odd if what I said did not in some sense represent my intellectual history. It would be odd if (being thoroughly candid) I said, 'I invite you to accept this argument, but I have never been convinced by it', 'This is a plausible view, but I have never found it attractive in the least', or 'These are the arguments I offer you, but I'll not tell you my own reasons for thinking their conclusion is true'. The obvious retort here is to say that of course the professed arguments might quite well do the job, and in that event it would be entirely unimportant whether the author's private thinking diverged from his public utterances. Indeed his private reasoning might be of a very much lower calibre. And this is true enough, - it might happen. But the way one does ethical theory is not to keep chattering, on the chance of saying something sound. One directly endeavours to make sense; and pitiful though it may be, the only way for me to pursue this endeavour is to say only those things which make sense to me.

I would like to draw your attention to some of the merits of deliberately doing philosophy in the quasi-autobiographical way I suggest, - or the demerits of not doing so. One suspects that it is in fact the usual way, but not deliberately, and that because of the inevitable self-consciousness attaching to it, and the misleading connotations of the objective or about-ideas-not-about-myself way of speaking, philosophers are induced to say some very distressing things. We often see, for example, the expression 'some philosophers think', followed by a view which is neither to be heard around the common rooms, nor to be found to an extent such as would make it worth mentioning in the books of philosophy. It is only natural to suspect in such a case that it is not the prevalence of the opinion which has led the author to mention it, but the fact that he himself has at one time been attracted or deceived by it, and perhaps suspects that other people have the same guilty secret. If this were the case, then in accordance with the principles above set forth, he need not confess, - that is merely personal and irrelevant. But equally it is a mistake to attempt to conceal his guilt through the creation of fictitious villains, fools and die-hards. All he needs do is represent it as the plausible, seductive or natural idea it is, and talk about it as such.

Another thing which is very commonly found in philosophy, (and I find myself doing it, if you want to know), is elaborate and zealous performances in criticism of 'tendencies', 'assumptions', 'presuppositions', etc., which the author flushes from behind every bush, even the most unlikely, and trounces with the most thorough, dry and deadly argument. On such occasions, particularly when it is fairly doubtful whether many of the bushes actually do conceal the monster, and when it is hard to believe that such dry arguments are really what occasions such extreme anxiety, one is led to wonder whether the performance is actually the conscientious caretakership it is made out to be, or whether it is not rather something the author has his own private reasons for wanting to say, - something about which he would find it embarrassing to be forthright, and therefore chooses to express indirectly through the process of dry and public criticism. In any case where these suspicions were correct, I don't think one can say that if the gentleman in question practised a little candour, then what he said would always be better philosophy. His embarrassment with his private views might be very well taken. But one can say both that he would be a better philosopher, in that he would make fewer mistakes, and that philosophy in general would benefit, in that it would be less cluttered with curious

misrepresentations and strangely inappropriate criticisms.

I will add a note about plagiarism. There is a temptation to regard this as a sin, and to either avoid using ideas or arguments which other people have already aired, or to be very scrupulous in acknowledging one's indebtedness on all sides. I think this is both impractical and unnecessary. On the first alternative it is impractical, - or unwise, - since one would then almost undoubtedly find oneself leaving unsaid things which, for the purpose, need to be said; - and on the second alternative it is impractical because one could never hope to acknowledge one's indebtedness to every source from which one has in fact profited. There is also a tendency for acknowledgements to cloud the issue, either by suggesting that one is relying rather on the authority of other philosophers than on the logic of the argument, or by inviting the reader to identify your views more extensively than you would wish, with those of the author acknowledged. And in any event acknowledgement is ordinarily unnecessary, since personal glory is not at stake in a philosophical discussion, which is about problems, not about how smart philosophers are. And it is worth mentioning, (and a trifle paradoxical, too), that this problem would never arise if one consciously pursued the method I have been advocating, since in representing the things that have

convinced, tempted, misled and puzzled me, my interest is confined to the characteristics of convincingness, attractiveness, confusingness, etc., which they had for me, and would never stray to the merely sociological fact that but for Aristotle, Kant or Collingwood, these ideas might never have crossed my mind. (Curious, the way the subjective method is objective, and vice versa.)

? It is curious, is it not? how the subjective method may be objective, and vice versa!

Chapter One.

The normal and natural thing to do as moral philosophy is simply to get on with the business in whatever way appears appropriate; - to discuss justice, virtue or the good life; to define 'the good'; to propound a theory about conscience or duty; - working towards some conclusion which one attempts both to state as clearly as possible, and to defend or justify. An examination of a selection of such performances would reveal two characteristic kinds of divergence: first differences of moral opinion, and second differences of opinion about what sort of thing a philosophical treatise about morals should be. Or about the latter perhaps I shouldn't say differences of opinion, since it is not always clear that the philosopher in question has any very explicit views about what a philosophical treatise should be like. But in any case different philosophers behave differently in this respect, and it is a difference of quite another sort from the distinctively moral difference.

Some people say that this peculiarly academic sort of disagreement is the only one that exists between philosophers - that they never really disagree morally, and that if one could effect a translation between the different ways of doing moral theory, he would find that everyone had the same thing to say. There is something to be said for this view. One does find different philosophers having a special interest in different areas of moral experience, and to this extent not being in a position to disagree with one another; one finds philosophical theories in general so un-practical that it is usually difficult, if not indeed inappropriate, to decide what actual concrete consequences they would have; and it is certainly difficult to compare the moral import of theories cast in such a very different mold as, say, that of Kant and that of Moore. If it is true that all philosophers are really saying the same thing, it would be very interesting to know what it is that they are saying. But I do not think it is true. I strongly suspect that Kant, for example, would think Butler's morals shoddy, Moore's precious, and those of Epicurus muddled. I am quite sure that it is not the case that the vehemence with which Kant's ethical theory is criticised is born of austere academic disagreements; and I know that I myself have what is as far as I can tell a purely moral affinity with some philosophers and a

corresponding disaffinity with others, and that this often disagrees with my views as to their purely philosophical merits.

But it is not a thing which at present matters very much. What I want to say is that in any case, differences of the 'academic' sort are very noticeable in moral philosophy, and it is these which throughout I shall be concerned to discuss. So far I have only described them as differences of opinion as to what sort of thing moral philosophy should be, and I must now attempt to be more explicit as to their nature. They are of two general kinds: differences as to what I shall for the present call the 'goal' of moral theory, and differences as to the purely theoretical standards by which it is to be judged.

By differences of goal I mean differences of opinion about the answers to such questions as, Should moral philosophy aim to instruct people morally? If so, what form should such instruction take? Should it be forthright and explicit, or indirect and psychological? If the former, should it be detailed and particular, or succinct and general? Should it attempt to instruct people as to the whole of morality, or only as to some aspects of it? And if on the other hand philosophy should not have moral instruction as its aim, what

should it do?

By differences of theoretical standard, I mean disagreements with regard to how clear and unambiguous it is necessary to be, disagreements as to what degree of stringency of argument is required (or as to whether argument is necessary at all), and disagreements as to what sort of argument is appropriate to the nature of the subject. To be assured that there is a wide variance of practice in these respects, one need only remind oneself of Aristotle's schoolmasterly remarks on the subject in *Nicomachean Ethics*, of Kant's annoyance, in the 'Fundamental Principles', with those popular philosophers whose works are "a disgusting medley of compiled observations and half-reasoned principles", of the murkiness of Bradley's ethical writings, the groundlessness of those of Mill, the ethical theorizing of social scientists, or the quality of daily ethical discussions in university common rooms.

I will devote this chapter to expounding in more detail the above distinctions concerning the nature of ethics, and to exploring some of the ways in which they may become inter-related in the course of the actual business of moral theorizing.

7 To enlarge upon the subject of the goals of ethics I think I cannot do better than ~~to~~ go back to what may at any rate pass as the beginning, and set down some alternatives which might naturally present themselves to a novice. I know that such a list could never hope to be either comprehensive or truly primordial. But even so it is perhaps not less promising than to attempt to classify the bewildering array of technical and often over-sophisticated theories offered by the history of philosophy. Moreover I think the presumption is a fair one, that even such complicated fellows as Spinoza and Hegel were not so unlike the rest of us that their basic aims might not be discovered to be some or other of those I am about to set forth.

First then, let us say, one may attempt to discover and formulate the principle or principles of morality - some succinct and very general formula by the use of which, either directly or indirectly, correct moral decisions could be made. An example of such a theory would be the Utilitarian principle that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to promote the reverse of happiness."* And I suppose that a definition of 'the good' would be

*J.S. Mill: Utilitarianism, Everyman's, 1948, p. 6.

another example, this time of a not so directly employable principle. This way of proceeding, supposing it were successful, would have the obvious merits of being direct and explicit, thoroughly comprehensive, and readily intelligible by anyone who chose to employ it. Its directness, as compared with the character of some theories, can be likened to the difference between asking your room-mate to close the door, and complaining to him of a beastly draught. It is comprehensive in the sense that in principle it should supply a sufficient clue to the making of any and all moral decisions - no further hints or qualifications should be necessary. It is in this sense also that it is intelligible.

Secondly, if we doubt the possibility of such a single principle, (or if we merely start to work in a different way), we may undertake the toil of casuistry, by which is generally meant the practice of setting forth our duties one by one, trying to make it quite precise, on what sort of occasions they arise or do not arise, how they may conflict one with another, and how these conflicts are to be resolved. In short, casuistry endeavours to take care of all the brain work required by the moral life, - except of course the effort of memory that is needed to master its endless niceties. It is like the first kind of theory in its directness,

as well as, at least in principle, in its comprehensiveness. But whereas you might say the former type was nothing if it was not comprehensive, casuistry is in practice so only in proportion to the diligence of the theorist. And it is doubtful whether one could ever know that adequate coverage had been achieved.

When I refer to casuistry I shall hereafter mean the sort of thing above outlined. But I shall call 'casuistical' any theory which aims to have, or can be taken as having, direct practical application. I have added the qualification "or can be taken as having.." in order to include theories which, though represented by some very sophisticated people as not being intended to have practical application, are yet in themselves of such a nature that they might as well have been so intended. By this token I would call theories of the first kind 'casuistical'.

Thirdly we may think it either less presumptuous or more philosophical to direct our efforts to something less immediately practical, - and so make it our business to say, not things which affect people's behaviour, but their thinking. Of course anything you say will first affect a person's thinking; but perhaps I could express what I mean by saying that in this case one is trying to

affect people's thinking as such, not merely as a means of affecting their behaviour. Or perhaps it would be better to say that in the first two types of theory, the attempt was to affect what people think, whereas in the ²third it is to make a difference in how they think. In the former cases, there might be a direct substitution of one set of ideas for another; whereas here, if a person's ideas changed, it would only be because they proved unsuitable to the new manner of thinking. Still there appears actually to be no very crisp distinction to be drawn here, because of course a person may always think that he should think in a certain manner, and in this case 'how' he thinks is also 'what' he thinks. But even here the content of his thought is quite different in kind from what it is when he is thinking about, say, telling lies. ... In any case people do have ways of thinking, of the character of which they are for the most part scarcely conscious, and with respect to which they are certainly not deliberate. I may now offer some examples. People tend to think by categories, rather than by particulars. Thus if a person is a Jew, they will take him without question to possess characteristics which many Jews possess; or if a social proposal is made by a communist, they will automatically take it to be as iniquitous as they think communists to be. Or again, people tend to compartmentalize their lives, keeping, say, their family and social life quite separate from

their business life, or their intellectual and artistic life quite separate from both; and this separation may appear to them to justify applying quite different moral, aesthetic or other standards to the different compartments. Or once again, people tend to be 'absolutist' in their thinking. If something is once thought wicked, they will take it to be bad absolutely, not just here and now, under these special conditions. I would not be entitled at this stage to pronounce that any of these were bad habits. Suffice it to say that there are choices to be made here, which might invite philosophical investigation.

I am not able to offer an example of any celebrated philosopher who has extensively made this sort of thing his problem, but amongst the lesser breed, it is certainly a common worry, and extensive talk about it is to be found in the writings of social scientists. One suspects, although in the general confusion it is difficult to say, that many instances of 'relativism' are muddled attempts to treat the problem of the third example I gave; and there is a further suspicion, perhaps even more to be distrusted, that the affection which many philosophers with a special interest in morals have for 'monism' is a confused expression of their concern over such things

as the departmentalization of the moral life mentioned in the second example.

I think it is worth noting that these are subjects about which it is embarrassing to talk: A and B can fairly cheerfully chat together about C's mental habits, (and I note how, above, I found myself referring to 'some people'), - but A will find it awkward to talk to B about B's habits. It is easy enough to talk to a person about things which he deliberately does, or concerning which he has explicit opinions. But it is somehow too personal, too almost psychiatric, to offer criticism on things which belong intimately to a person, but which he does not consciously own as his.

And there is another difficulty, which I think I can only explain by an example. Suppose you want to criticise the departmentalizing habit: you first find that it is difficult to specify an object for criticism, since it takes so many forms; and on another side, I think one would have difficulty providing a specific alternative. If it were the case that the cure lay simply in desisting from departmentalization, the job would be easy. But presumably we must departmentalize in some way, and to attempt to specify the right way would be to practise casuistry. Similarly with the 'absolutist' habit: if one is to be 'relativist' or flexible in one's think-

ing, one must be so in a certain way; and we must consequently either criticise 'absolutism' without offering an alternative, or once again take up some form of casuistry. I shall not assume that such an eventuality would be intolerable. But on the one hand it is peculiarly difficult to be casuistical about thinking (rather than acting), and on the other my point is simply that this kind of theory has a tendency, if conscientiously done, to end up as something quite different from what it set out to be.

A fourth possibility is the aim of informing, or reminding people of some of the more subtle and delicate features of the world in which they live, particularly those which are morally interesting. I don't mean plain facts, like the number of bobbies in London, the weight of a hydrogen atom or the colour of the Carribbean Sea, but curious and uneasy truths, such as the fact that we must always be at least a little uncertain what other people are thinking, that we can't altogether trust ourselves, that there are some states of affairs in which there is no intelligent thing to do, some states of affairs in which there is nothing for it but that the innocent should suffer, and some states of affairs in which it is cruel to be kind. Thanks largely to the ministrations of those who call themselves 'Existential-

ists', we are not nowadays permitted to be unaware that there are quantities of such facts. I am sure both that they are very important, and that we are inclined to forget them. We commonly act, for example, as if we knew people's motives perfectly well, when it would be better to act in a way which provided for the possibility that we were mistaken. We often criticise people's actions as if there had been something better that they might have done, when in fact the situation was such that anything they did would have been in some way regrettable. We often blithely pursue what appears to be the course of virtue, unaware of its insidious cruelty. And so forth.

This again is a type of theory which is directed to people's thinking processes, inasmuch as the sensitivity to these things is, I suppose, a mode of thought. But the difference between this and the previous procedure is that in this case the making of any given point is at least partly dependent on empirical states of affairs, whereas the constituents of the former kind of theory, if not, as they say, a priori, are at least not capable of being insisted upon by means of any reference to the empirical world. Here, however, one is dependent at least for the significance of what is done, on what is not empirical: it would be of little interest to know that sometimes the innocent must suffer if we did not at the

same time think that it was somehow morally regrettable that such a thing should happen.

Another way of doing ethical theory, perhaps less likely to be undertaken by a beginner, is that of trying, not to provide people with anything positive, anything which they might not otherwise have enjoyed, - but to cure them of mistakes into which they are led by such things as language, popular philosophy, social science, star-gazing and thinking too much. A few typical blunders inviting such treatment are: on learning that the earth is not really the centre of the universe one is brought to the conclusion that 'man' cannot be as important as he conceives himself to be; on hearing of the theory of relativity, one reflects that 'Oh dear! if everything is relative, morals too must be relative, and so...'; on dissecting the human brain one discovers no conscience and no soul, and concludes that all this talk about virtue and duty must be based on a false assumption; or (would anyone be so foolish as this?) having noticed that most adjectives 'stand for properties', and finding to one's dismay that the word 'good' does not appear to stand for anything, one concludes that this must be a meaningless word.

A characteristic which these five suggestions have

in common, and one which may appear distasteful to the hardened philosopher, is that they all attempt to make some practical difference, - or to put it most baldly, to do some good. This may be a mistake, but it is certainly a very natural aspiration to have, and one which, I hope no one will deny, is shared by not a few distinguished philosophers, - by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, for example, and by Spinoza, Butler, Kant, Mill and Moore. But I shall discuss the question of its justifiability at a later stage (Chapter Three).

A sixth possible aim is simply (simply?) to understand, for the sake of understanding. I should think this would always be an acquired, never a natural taste, but acquired tastes are in general by no means the least exquisite. The word 'understand' in this context is not one which to me carries any direct suggestion as to what would constitute an example; but if I set down some questions which appear to be ethical questions, and which have no very plain practical import, perhaps this will supply a meaning. 'With how much logical assurance can one assert ethical propositions?' 'Is there any sense in which they can be regarded as empirical statements?' 'If so, what, if any, is the logical status of the residue, if any?' 'What are the likenesses and differences between making moral decisions and making other

sorts of decision?'

Personally I entertain some doubts as to how non-practical such questions are. One can of course ask them in a spirit of pure curiosity, but this one can do with any question, and not least, I should think, with the more obviously practical questions underlying the earlier five sorts of investigation. And it appears to me that there are conditions under which the answers to any of the present questions could make a practical difference. If, for example, one had a way of assessing the assurance with which moral propositions can be asserted, it would or could presumably make a significant contribution to a decision whether to accept any given proposition. Again if one had a way of determining what empirical elements are properly allowable in moral thinking, this could be alleged in criticism of people whose thought was too empirical, or not sufficiently so, etc.

Here at any rate are six possible ways of doing moral philosophy, and my exposition of them should serve, if nothing else, to show that there is some problem of what to do in ethics, and that anyone who generalizes about what philosophy has always sought to do, for example prove to people that they should be good, or define the good, is much to be distrusted. The history of philosophy

contains also at least two species of concern which I have not mentioned. The first is the very large class of subsidiary issues which may arise in the course of doing any of the above, - questions like how to handle moral scepticism, or the problem of freedom, or the problem of whether one can think there is a true morality making genuine demands on us, without also thinking that there is a God, or that the world is the kind of place in which this is thinkable. I have not assumed that these are meaningless questions, but I do think that they are secondary, in the sense that the answers to them would never internally contribute to the more obviously ethical deliberations I have outlined - (the knowledge, for example, that we are free, or unfree, would have no tendency to show that we should or should not tell lies, or should think in an 'absolutist' or 'relativist' way, or anything else of practical import), - while on the other hand one could not sensibly engage in such deliberations without at least hypothetically assuming the good sense of ethics proper. But if you disagree with this, I think it will not make a great difference to the remainder of the discussion.

The other general sort of philosophical activity which I have not mentioned is that type of investigation which is like social science, except that its centre of

interest is moral phenomena. Questions like, What are the psychological factors which make one man conscientious, and another not? What makes people become socialists? How did the capitalist system come into being? What are the causes of superstition? To what extent are neuroses caused by guilt feelings? etc. I think it is sufficiently obvious that the moral interest of such questions is entirely non-essential - that they would not be different in any epistemologically important way if for the moral terms one substituted something of a plainly secular interest, - if we asked, What makes one man like cream in his coffee, and another, milk? How did the rules of cricket come into being? or To what extent are neuroses caused by moon beams? And on the other hand, one could define the moral terms used in various ways, presumably according to the moral views one held, and could also make differing moral judgments about them. One could think socialism good, and capitalism bad, or vice versa, and one could think guilt feelings essential to a moral outlook, or one could think that they are something of which the wise man will endeavour to rid himself. And all such views will alter the character of the empirical investigations to which they are subsidiary.

I have not intended the six suggested ways of doing

ethics as exclusive alternatives. I would think that, given a general principle, it would be gratuitous to append to it anything which could be described as casuistry, and vice versa; and I should think that to the extent that either of these purported to provide a definitive way of making moral decisions, they would render unnecessary such further refinements about ways of thinking and kinds of error as are offered by the three subsequent procedures. If it were true that given the Utilitarian principle one cannot go wrong, what need remains for advice about, say, 'absolutism'? - But on the face of it, beyond the considerable threat that the result would be a disorganized mass of compiled observations, there appears to be nothing further to stand in the way of any combinations of any of the six.

In pursuit of any of the goals, one could, at least as far as can be seen in advance, adopt any technique of discovery which appeared promising or appropriate. This is not to say that there might not in the end be only one, or even no method at all, adequate to achieving any given end. But the idea itself of casuistry, for example, does not include the idea that it should or should not be pursued through introspection, or intuition, or consulting the wise, or generalizing about the opinions of others, or anything else. And I think the same could be

said of any of the others. Some of them, too, may be pursued either by directly discussing the matters in question, or by indirect methods, - by implication, insinuation, or by saying things which could reasonably be said only if something else were presupposed. But of this I shall have more to say elsewhere (particularly at the end of Chapter Two).

I will now attempt to provide a more detailed account of the theoretical standards, by which the fruit of any of the above endeavours (or any others) may be judged. At this point I wish only to outline what sort of standards would appear to be pertinent, - not to lay down any conclusions as to what standards must be accepted, or even whether any are necessary at all.

I said above that they were of two kinds, - standards of clarity, and of justification. With regard to the former, I should say that there are two prime respects in which a statement in ethical theory may be unclear - in its essential meaning, and in the claim that is made for it. If one says 'It is true for the most part that adultery is wrong', the essential meaning of the proposition, - the definition of 'adultery', and what is meant by saying that an action is 'wrong', - may be quite clear; but it is unclear, precisely what

claim is made for it. It would not become clear until some way was provided of ascertaining when exceptions to the rule occurred. On the other hand if it is said, 'You should never diddle with clients' funds', there is no doubt what claim is made for the proposition, but considerable uncertainty about its essential meaning (i.e. what constitutes 'diddling'?).

A second point is that there appears to be some relation between clarity and comprehensiveness, at least in something as (so to speak) pretentious as moral theory, since anyone looking to it for enlightenment might properly expect that it told the whole story, and would remain unclear about the significance of what was said as long as there were important things left unsaid. For example if I say 'The wise man is without pity, fear or malice', while in ordinary conversation this is in respect of its clarity a highly acceptable remark, yet in philosophy it remains unclear to the extent that we are inclined to ask, 'But are these all the essential characteristics of the wise man?'. Asking such questions is not just a typically philosophical bad habit - it is made appropriate by the natural and perhaps necessary pretensions of the trade.

From this it would appear that the simplest ideal of

ethical theory is thorough comprehensiveness. But it may not follow that such an ideal is essential for clarity's sake. It is possible that by carefully explaining the limitations of a theory, its proper significance might remain plain, in spite of its failure to be complete.*

Thirdly, there is a fairly obvious distinction to be drawn between clarity and simplicity. A simple idea is always clear, but clear in the subjective sense that it can be grasped easily, rather than in the objective sense of expressing adequately what it sets out to express. The former sort of clarity is always desirable, but it is only in the latter sense, I think, that clarity can be demanded of a philosophical theory. There is always a temptation to achieve clarity by means of simplicity. But unless the subject under discussion is itself simple, the hope of this would appear to be small indeed.

I would like to make a further distinction concerning clarity for which I shall employ an example as follows: Arthur and Beatrice, we will suppose, each understand adequately the psychological infirmity from which Patrick is suffering. Arthur is attempting to explain this complex state of affairs to Charlie, who is an intellig-

* See also Chapter Two, p. 75, seq.

ent citizen, and well enough acquainted with the language of psychology in general, but who has no prior information about Patrick. There appear to be three states of affairs in which Arthur could be said to have failed to make himself clear. In the first, Arthur's language is itself unclear; neither Beatrice nor Charlie understand what is being said, and Beatrice in particular is not able to say whether it is an accurate account of the matter. This I will call an instance of verbal unclarity, to distinguish it from the other two, which I shall call cases of contextual unclarity. In the second case we will suppose that Arthur's account is such that, were it not for the presence of Beatrice, Charlie would have no reason, either verbal or drawn from his general knowledge of psychology, to ask further questions. Arthur's account is both linguistically intelligible and scientifically plausible; but still Beatrice, knowing Patrick, knows that it is not a clear account of his ailment. In the third case, Charlie understands well enough what is being said - his difficulty is not linguistic, - but still in spite of the fact that, not knowing Patrick, he is in no position to say that the account is inaccurate, he is puzzled and led to ask further questions. What Arthur says does not seem to square with his general knowledge of psychology. His questioning might end either in Arthur's having to amend his account, (in which case one

might have expected Beatrice to have something to say), or in Charlie's being satisfied with the original way of putting it. He might then say that he had not appreciated how unique was Patrick's story.

In Ethics, (or should I say particularly in Ethics?), there is yet another kind of confusion which arises, partly owing to the profusion of expectations commonly entertained with regard to it, partly owing to the theorist's own indecision as to which if any of these he is aiming to satisfy, and as to what is the appropriate method of doing so. In the first sort of case, for example where through reading a theory which was never so intended as an attempt to instruct me as to what I should do, I find it unclear or confusing, - one is tempted to say that so long as when read in the appropriate way it is not confusing, this is no concern of the theorist, particularly if he has provided some instruction as to how the thing should be read.

But the fault in these matters is not always with the reader: he is often not advised what he should expect; and this is often because there is no adequate advice possible. Many philosophers give every appearance of being themselves confused as to what they are trying to achieve, (and as a consequence confused as to how to

go about doing it). When Butler, for example, talks about benevolence and self-love, is his theory psychological or casuistical? If it is the former, why does he not follow an empirical method? And if it is the latter, why does he sustain such an appearance of doing psychology, and why does he not adduce the kind of reasons for his conclusions that one would expect in connection with a point of morals? In the earlier example, the three types of unclarity were such that they could be removed without any essential alteration in Arthur's thinking (although any of them might, of course, betray 'essential' confusion). But here the reader is confused, not through his own deficiencies, nor through the theorist's inability to express himself, but because of an essential muddle in the author's thought.

This much may provide an indication at any rate of the general ways in which theories may vary as to their clarity. I want now to perform the same function with respect to the justification of them.

One is tempted to say 'Of course we all know what is meant by justification, - a proposition in geometry is justified by the kind of reasoning you see in Euclid; one in physics by taking you through the chain of experiments and thoughts which has led the physicist to his

conclusion; if you ask Peter how he knows there are twenty-seven books in his room he says he has counted them carefully; if you ask Paul how he knows it is cold in Alaska he will tell you he has never heard any different, and what's more it stands to reason, being so far north; and if you ask Kant how he knows he shouldn't tell lies he will say that it is not a maxim which is universalizable'. But this is neither true nor very illuminating. It is not true because we can't all of us always tell the difference between justification and rationalization, for example, or between either of these and persuasion. We have not always known the appropriate technique for justifying any given type of proposition, and we are not yet sure, as far as one can see, what is the appropriate method for justifying ethical propositions. It is not illuminating, because it provides us no way of recognizing fresh instances of justification. It tempts us to say of a treatise in psychology, 'This is not well argued because it is not like Euclid', - while at the same time warning us against this, in that geometry is not like physics, and neither of them is like geography. But we are assured in spite of this that they all have their methods of argument.

Of course, philosophers cannot hope to offer a definition of justification which would provide a sufficient

criterion of any given instance of it. But I see no reason why they should not say anything they may find to say which represents a necessary condition; and this is what I am about to attempt.

First, several things which are like justification, but not it. Of these I will mention methods of discovery, explanation of one's thinking in terms of causes, the causal explanation of the fact that one believes something, and justification of oneself for holding an opinion.

It is hard to imagine any practising theorist making reference to his method of discovery as such, in support of a theory he wishes to maintain. It would be silly to say anything which amounted to 'This theory must be true because I have been so empirical', or 'because I have tried and erred', or 'because I have been disinterested', just as it would be silly for a wife to try to convince her husband that her cake was very tasty, by assuring him that she had followed the recipe accurately. One tests cakes, not by studying their history, or that of the cook, but by examining the cake itself. And it is the same, I should think, with theories. Not only is it the case that since any good scientist can claim to have been empirical, disinterested, etc., these representations

do not serve to distinguish his view from that of any other good scientist; - it is also the case that a particular theorist could allow criticisms of himself on some of these counts, and still claim that his view was correct, on the ground that all such things had to do with him, not with his theory, and they in no way affected the argument which he presented for the truth of his theory.

I said that this kind of mistake is hard to imagine in practice; and indeed it is rarely to be found. Text books in social science commonly begin threateningly with some sort of homily about prejudices, stereotypes, etc., but when they at last get on to the business at hand it is in general to be found that such reflections are in no way employed in their procedure, and might quite nicely have been left unsaid. And were it not for the well-known good sense of mankind, this might appear surprising, in view of the great pre-eminence that talk about methods of discovery has had in philosophical deliberations about knowledge, particularly since the time of Francis Bacon. It was a considerable milestone in the history of human thought to realize that when one is making representations as to what is the case, it is appropriate to have a look and see whether it actually is the case. The excitement over it is entirely under-

standable; but one can not now help thinking that its importance may have been exaggerated, and that the excitement might by now quite well have subsided, at least to a point where people were no longer to call themselves 'empiricists' (signifying thereby that they think the whole secret of knowledge lies in this one principle).

It is easy enough to see, though, how the mistake is made, because while there is no definitive relation between the method of discovery and the form of justification, there is yet some relation between the history of discovery and the way the conclusion is justified. The method of discovery is expressible, if at all, in a collection of maxims and aphorisms like 'Be very careful', 'Keep your test-tubes dry', 'Don't be fooled by the results of one experiment, - special conditions may prevail which you haven't noticed', 'Don't be discouraged by negative instances, - they may be very informative', etc. And I assume it is plain enough that to cite one's conformity with any or all of such maxims will prove nothing. Similarly I take it to be obvious that a plain history of one's investigations is little to the point. This would be too anecdotal, too full of tribulation.

And yet there must be some relation, otherwise there

would be no necessity for any process of investigation. I shall here only say that what I conceive this relation to be is that the justification consists of a logical history of the discovery process. By this I mean that the final argument has no regard for the chronological order of discovery, nor for all the many parts of the process which in the end appear irrelevant. But it is nevertheless historical in the sense that the things which are mentioned actually did happen, and happened in the way specified. And it is logical, both in the sense that it displays the reason for the particular internal delimitation of the happenings mentioned, - and in the sense that it connects them together in such a way as to display their meaning or significance. This last is a point which it is very difficult to communicate. One can say that the theorist tries to convey something with his account which is like the satisfaction one feels when one 'sees' a mathematical argument; - or that he tries to re-create the atmosphere of problem-and-solution in which his investigations were conducted. But no way of putting it seems to do more than ostend a particular kind of experience, and if one is not familiar with this experience, no words seem to provide any clue to what sort of thing is meant.

A second way of thinking which is like justification,

but not it, can be described generally as the explanation of an idea in terms of its cause. Consider the following examples:

'Albert must be right in thinking X, because he is sane (or wise, brilliant, has an I.Q. of...)'.

'Beatrice can't be right, because she is paranoid (or a fool, too young, etc.)'

'You must believe me, because I am a philosopher, and I know.'

'I say this is true because I have intuited it (or because inspection has revealed it to me, or because my mind has performed certain operations known to be the operations necessary to the production of a true idea).'

The temptation to talk this way is, I suppose, natural enough, particularly in matters where there is no other definite way of ascertaining the truth. We suppose that things like true ideas are the product of minds; and given this much it is only to be expected that the product will vary as the producing agent, just as the quality and performance of an automobile will vary as the equipment and methods used in the place where it is made. A mind therefore which is in fine working condition and possesses all the equipment for the job will turn out ideas superior to those begotten of a mind not so constituted; and we can assess the ideas by studying the mind. What could be more reasonable?

Yet on second thoughts it is not so simple. One does

not assess the merits of an automobile by visiting the factory, but by testing the car itself for comfort, mileage, speed, pick-up, ease of handling, etc., and by enquiring of long-time owners about such things as its endurance. There are some things about it which can best be learned by visiting the factory, - what quality steel it is made of, or how many coats of paint it has. But there is nothing which can only be learned there, while there are many things, comfort, for example, concerning which no amount of inspection of the factory could adequately satisfy us.

Furthermore, a factory is not assessable except in reference to the goods it produces or is to produce. Given the specifications of an Austin saloon, I could visit the Longbridge works and tell you whether I think they are well-equipped to produce such a car. Or, given the specifications, I could decide how well-equipped they are to produce some new design of car. But one can form no opinion of a factory in the absence of information about what it is to produce. Nor does the quality of the goods count here: there are states of affairs which would provide one with good reason to say 'This is a perfect factory for producing these low-quality goods', and equally to say 'This is such a poor factory that I don't know how it succeeds in producing these high-quality goods'.

Carrying these remarks over to the subject of minds and ideas, (and here I do not wish to pronounce upon whether minds, like factories, can be visited and studied apart from their products), - we find that ideas can only be tested by studying them, themselves, - checking them for whatever may be analogous to comfort, pick-up, fuel consumption, etc.; we find that if a proposition like 'It is raining now' is enunciated, no amount of assurances or evidence of fine workmanship will eradicate that stubborn urge to have a peek out the window; and we find that if any invariable relation between the truth of ideas and the characteristics of minds were discoverable, it would rely on our ability to tell independently that the ideas were true, and would extend only so far as this was possible. In the case of classes of ideas (if there were any) whose truth we did not know how to assess, we would of course not be equipped to discover any such relations.

Or we could put it another way by saying that when Millie says 'It is raining' and we ask 'Is this true?', this is a question, not about Millie, but about the proposition she has advanced; and to consider the matter by raising queries about Millie, - by saying 'Are you crazy?' or 'Don't be a fool', is always to change the subject.

Another thing like justification, yet not it, is the explanation of the fact that one believes something, - as in 'I believe that the earth is round because it has always been so held in our family', or 'because I had a traumatic experience with a circular argument', or 'because my great²⁰ grandmother had an affair with Christopher Columbus'. This is in some respects like the last, except that where in the previous cases there was a reference to what was supposed to be the direct cause of an idea, the causes here indicated are indirect, - they operate on me, and I in my turn, because I have been so affected, think differently from what I might otherwise have done. The problem here is not so much to elucidate the error, as to explain why it is so often made. And this I think is because the kind of explanation offered is so often either true, or at least plausible. In my family, it has (I presume) been for some generations thought that the world is round; and while I personally like to think that this has not very much to do with my believing it, it is still the kind of thing that could have had everything to do with it. Consequently its very truth tempts me to offer it as an answer to the question, 'Why do you think that the world is round?' And yet if it were true, what I ought to say is, 'I have no reason for thinking so. I have never thought about it. It just runs in the family'.

Finally, I will mention the justification of oneself in holding a belief. An example is this:

Q: Why do you think the universe is expanding?

A: Well I am no astronomer, and I really have no idea how to tell. But it is a view which has a wide currency amongst astronomers, and in particular is held by X and C, who are highly regarded in the trade, and whose scientific respectability even I can recognize.

This might be called the model of the 'outsider's argument'; and I would say that it was, of its kind, a genuine form of justification. It carefully applies all the criteria that one who neither knows nor can be expected to know anything about the subject can apply, and leaves him as much entitled as he ever will be to the opinion, - and more entitled than he would have been had he made no examination of the credentials of those who hold the view as experts. But it is an outsider's argument, - it is not through thinking this way that X and C acquire their 'scientific respectability'. If scientists thought this way they would spend their days waiting for others to make pronouncements; and it would be logically impossible for the first man who propounded a theory, to have any justification for it at all, since there would be no opinion he could cite. Thus he would not be respectable, the others could not follow suit, and the waiting would have to be resumed.

But this is all too obvious in the example given. Now let us look at a slightly different case:

Q: Why do you think that you should pay your debts?

A: Well I am no (human being? moral philosopher?), and I would really have no idea how to tell. But it is a view which has a wide currency amongst the experts, and in particular is held by X and C, who are regarded as wise men, and whose wisdom even I can recognize.

If we accepted the analogy here we would have to say that this was again a perfectly respectable 'outsider's argument, but that it would not do at all for the expert, and that even for the outsider its worth depends logically on the existence of expert opinion, constituted in an entirely different manner.

One might try to say that of course the difference between empirical and practical discourse made the analogy unacceptable. But, at least if there is no more to the argument than this it is too glib, because in all analogies there are differences, but they are not all essential; and nothing has yet been said to show that this particular difference is of a crucial sort. On the contrary I think it will be seen that it is not essential, if we repeat the conjecture above, that if watching others were the expert or first-order way to decide questions, there could logically be nothing but eternal waiting. This reflection did not mention or in any way depend on the recognition that it was empirical discourse with which we were concerned; and this being the case, the argument is not weakened or altered by the substitution of any other form of discourse.

I shall therefore take it that in morals an Outsider's Argument could have the restricted validity it has, only presupposing what I must now call an Insider's Argument. But now we must notice a difference between the two cases which does seem to carry some significance. When I was formulating the 'Answer' in the second example, I had some difficulty in making the substitution for 'astronomer' (expert), (and if you think this is just my stupidity, or that it is a trick, try it yourself). This might be explained either by saying that there do not happen to be any experts in morals, or by saying that there do not happen to be any non-experts. Since the former alternative appears equivalent to saying that there is no possibility of rational argument in morals, I have a considerable inclination to prefer the latter. And I think the view that there can be no non-experts receives some substantiation if we reflect how odd it would be, either that one who must after all think as an insider concerning at least the particularity of his moral life, should decline to do so concerning the more general features of it, - or that he should allow something which concerns him so intimately as the conduct of his life, to be determined for him so passively, so arbitrarily, as opinions which he accepts on the authority of 'experts'. For the ideas which one has appropriated by the Outsider's Argument are, one might say, curiosities, entertainments. It would be

odd for a man to regard himself as having a stake in them - to be in any way embarrassed or disjoined if the current of expert opinion left them behind, or rejected them.* And it would be equally odd if a man did not feel embarrassed or disjoined if the ideas governing the conduct of his life came to appear to him to be mistaken. I would therefore say that in morals, either there is no reasoning possible at all, or if there is, there is at least no place for the Outsider's Argument. All the reasoning must be from the inside. (This is a slightly less misleading way of putting it than to say that there are no non-experts in moral discourse, for while this mistakenly suggests that everyone is a polished moral thinker, the other conveys the idea that in morals we either think in the first-order mode, or we do not actually think morally at all.)

With the exception of the remarks in the last paragraph, I have so far been talking mainly negatively about

* It would be strange, too, in empirical discourse, for a scientist to build anything on what he has acquired by an Outsider's Argument. A scientist may accept empirical observations on trust, but he can be expected at least to understand the reasoning by which they yield a conclusion before he uses this conclusion as part of his theory. And

justification, - it is not this, not that, etc. I must now try to say something positive about it.

It is always a logical mistake for a person to offer in justification of a belief, different reasons from the reasons which have actually induced him to accept it. If, for example, having noticed that there are situations in which his duties conflict and it is impossible not to contravene one or other of two rules, he comes to the conclusion that duties cannot be absolute, it is by recounting these reflections that he can be expected to publicly present this view, not by talking of the sexual behaviour of South Sea Islanders, or by casting doubts on the Two Worlds hypothesis which he sees in Plato's Theory of Ideas. Of course a discrepancy of this sort will not necessarily invalidate his argument: it is possible, if unlikely, that the reasons he professes are better than his actual reasons. Nor can one take it that the way to test an argument is to check for such a discrepancy, - to

(cont.) and if a scientist's theory is analogous to a person's morals, at least in the sense that they each have a 'stake' in them, then a person could similarly be expected to think as an 'insider' about morals.

study the arguer's mind and find out whether his actual reasons are different, - or to investigate whether he has a history of candour and can therefore be assumed to be candid in this instance. Arguments presumably have their own criteria, and if Euclid's arguments are uttered by a parrot, they are not less stringent for that.

What then is the significance of the point? - First, I think, it may serve as a counsel of prudence to those engaged in rational discourse of any sort: See that your professed arguments square with your actual reasons for accepting any idea. If you do not, it may not show anything wrong with your argument, but it will always be a ground for criticism of you personally. And secondly I think it indirectly provides one of the criteria of a sound argument, - that although it need not be identical with its author's reasons for accepting its conclusion, still it must be such that it would not be odd for people generally to accept its conclusion on the kind of grounds it provides. Through having read too much philosophy (or too little), one may come to explain to a blind man that the reason one helps him across the street is that doing this kind of thing distinguishes one from the brutes, or enables one to be free. But surely neither of these reasons would ever induce such behaviour.

Everything I have said so far has been merely an

attempt to elucidate what I mean by goals and standards in ethical theory. I shall now try to explore some of the relations between the various factors so far outlined. It is obvious that different degrees of stringency of standard could be adopted, and this might have considerable effect on the choice of goal, - possibly disqualifying some types of goal altogether, or having internal effects on any given type - curbing its ambition or scope, making necessary severe qualifications, etc. A philosopher who had no standards could say anything it pleased him to say; and on the other hand it is possible that having high enough standards might force us however reluctantly to decline to say anything whatever. (This may be the correct interpretation of Socrates' "Ignorance".)

The choice of goal, too, could affect the standard, both as to its stringency and as to its nature. If one chooses, for example, to do casuistry, it is no doubt possible, from the nature of the choice, to determine with what level of standard one must be content, - or in any case it will work itself out. Again, one can only decide in terms of the goal what type of argument will be appropriate. It would be foolish to look for mathematical demonstration in a crown prosecutor's argument about the guilt of an accused murderer, and foolish to look for plain empirical evidence as to whether we ought to pursue

the greatest happiness of the greatest number. And in neither case is this because it is expecting too much, but rather because these are not the sorts of argument which will establish these sorts of conclusion.

While the nature of the goal would always seem to be the prior consideration in questions about the nature of the argument to be used in justification, I think that in questions as to the stringency of the argument, if there is any rational way of settling them, it is not one which depends on the kind of thing which is being said, - otherwise there would be no possible way of disqualifying any goal. One could 'legitimately' say whatever one chose to say. And I therefore think that the question of stringency of standards is the ultimate question in moral philosophy.

There are some relations to be noted between clarity and justification. Clarity would appear to be a necessary prerequisite of justification. One can hardly offer logical support of a proposition which, through being unclear, is indeterminate in its meaning. But clarity does not in itself ordinarily constitute any form of justification. We are sometimes misled by the attractiveness of a very lucid statement into thinking it must be true; but if one's way of doing ethics was simply to provide as clear an account as possible of one's own moral perspective,

one could be entirely successful in this without such success having any tendency to show that everyone should think this way, or even whether I myself should think this way. But in this example, if one made no further claim about what was said than that it was a clear account of one's own thinking, then at least to its author, this claim would be justified by the clarity itself. But this is the only sort of case I can think of, in which clarity and justification are identical.

I have now outlined roughly and in general the materials of the problem I am tackling; and having put you in touch with this much of the problem, I may go on to ask and attempt to answer questions like 'How high a standard is necessary?', 'Can moral philosophy be practical?', 'Are there any rules of procedure which it is a mistake not to follow?', and 'Is there any form of argument which is particularly suited to the justification of moral ideas?'.

Chapter Two.

In this chapter I shall be mainly concerned to do two things, - first, to illustrate some of the ways in which the practise of ethical theory commonly displays varying theoretical standards, and second, to attempt to arrive at some conclusion as to what may properly be expected in this regard.

It is not always easy to know, in a given case, whether a proposition is an argument, or merely the exposition of a conclusion which would itself require an argument to support it. Take the proposition, "We have a natural right to property". Can this be divided into two parts such as

- (a) When we have acquired some article by recognized procedures we are entitled to regard it as ours and no one else's, and to think any person wicked who attempts against our will to make it his; and
- (b) This (immediately practical) proposition can be deduced from an empirical, theoretical, or in any case non-practical proposition about Mother Nature, or about the way we naturally and necessarily think, (or whatever it would be about)?

Or is it simply a statement claiming that in the class of natural rights is included the right to property? - a statement which, if it was empirical in intention, - if it was analogous to 'Amongst the animals in Africa are to be found lions', - would have to be justified empiric-

ally; - while if it were logical, claiming that 'the meaning' of the expression 'natural rights' is such that one can not fail to include 'property' as an instance, - would have to be justified in whatever way one could establish "the meaning of 'natural rights'".

Or again if it is said 'Man is born free', it is not obvious whether this should be taken as merely recording a supposedly ascertainable fact about men generally at the time of their first appearance in the world, or whether it is an oblique way of expressing the opinion that we should treat other people in such a way as to leave it entirely open to them to decide and act of their own accord, - or whether it at the same time expresses the latter opinion and justifies it by reference to the former.

And once again if we say 'Man is a social animal', it is not plain, at least from what has so far been said, whether this is a merely empirical observation, based on such facts as that we feel loneliness, enjoy parties, and depend on one another for our spiritual and material welfare, - or whether it claims to be a fact in a different and you might say metaphysical way, asserting that we really are social in spite of the fact that we often feel and act in an un- or anti-social way; - or again whether it says one or other of these things, but also carries

the implication that since we are social, we ought to be social. We are moral through being true to ourselves, and since we are social beings, we must so conceive ourselves, and act accordingly, (whatever that may involve).

In all these cases I am asking you to think the propositions merely by themselves. It is probable that if you looked up historical instances of their use, in Aristotle, Locke or Rousseau, some of the confusion would be cleared up by the context. But I am not here interested in commenting on these philosophers, but only in illustrating the point that it is easy to be unclear, not only in our way of expressing ourselves, but in our own minds, whether we are merely asserting something, or merely proving it, or both asserting and proving it. And the fact that we are sometimes content to remain thus confused, is symptomatic, I think, of our indecision as to what standards may be required of a philosophical theory, - or of our opinion that no very high standard is required.

It is not easy to know, either, if a philosophical utterance is to be taken as an argument, or merely as a method of influencing people in a certain direction. If a nasty critical philosopher went to work on a proposition like 'Man is born free' and said 'Look here, you can't say that. Freedom is not a characteristic of new-born babes, like the colour of their eyes, ~~or whether they~~

eyes, or whether they resemble their fathers, which you can observe. And even if there were some warrant for saying we are born free, it still would not follow that in later life it is necessary to respect people's freedom. You would not ask us to respect the youth of a middle-aged man, on the grounds that he was born young.', - he might be greeted with the reply that of course there was not the beginnings of an argument here, the thing was not intended as an argument. It was intended as a way of influencing people in the direction of a greater respect for freedom; and consequently if there is any criterion by which to judge the proposition, it is neither 'Is it true?', nor 'Would it argue for the conclusion if it were true?', but 'How well calculated is it to achieve its end?'. The defender of the proposition might go on to say that the making of such calculations is no easy task, and therefore invites the application of the philosophic mind. But I shall not here discuss either whether such a task is a proper one for philosophy, or how many examples of philosophising can best be interpreted in this way. Suffice it to say that there may be cases where things which are said with some of the airs of argumentation, may better be interpreted as attempts to influence.

There is some difference between influencing and persuading - or, since this sounds a little like a compar-

ative 'analysis' of these words, perhaps I should say that one can behave in a way significantly different from the way I have termed 'influencing', and this different way I think it appropriate to call 'persuasion', since this word is often used this way. When we are doing what I call influencing, the nature of the difference hoped-for is left unspecified, whereas when we are persuading, the difference is mentioned, - we are persuading people of something. Persuasion is a forthright or direct way of speaking, while influence is indirect and one might say, psychological. Persuasion, again, is to be distinguished from rational argument or justification in that in the former we appeal to things which we know or assume the person to be persuaded thinks, accepts, feels or likes, irrespective of whether we ourselves share these thoughts or feelings, or of whether the appeal to them is a logically satisfactory way of establishing the desired conclusion. If we try to argue that we should never tell lies by pointing out the awkwardness of it in some cases, we may know that this is a logically unsatisfactory argument, and yet use it because we think that people generally abhor the kind of inconvenience appealed to, sufficiently to blind them to the logical non-universality of the conclusion. Or if we know that Mabel is a Christian, we may try to convince her that as a Christian she must be

a pacifist, even though we ourselves are pagans, though we do believe in pacifism. But it is worth pointing out that one might have a good logical point in urging that Christians should be pacifists, and this would be accentuated in a case where the person urging it was neither a Christian nor a pacifist, but did so merely out of a love of intellectual integrity.

This possibility raises in a fairly sharp form the question, by what criteria we can distinguish justification from other things like persuasion, influence, etc. Can we say that any bad argument is a case of one or other of the non-rational forms, - that is, that the criteria are purely logical? Or should we say that the question is to be decided by reference to the intention of the arguer or performer? Or that it is some combination of the two? Or neither?

I don't think we could say either that all illogical arguments must be persuasion, influence, or something of the sort, or that all instances of persuasion are illogical arguments. It seems to me that a person could know what justification is, and be intelligently attempting it, and simply make a mistake. The only condition under which this could be denied, I should think, would be if we were forced to suppose that people never made mistakes except under the influence of some perverse motive. But I see no

reason to suppose that this is the case, and I therefore think that the criteria cannot be merely logical. It does appear, however, that if the mistake were of a certain sort, then even if there were grounds for saying that it was just a mistake on its author's part, we could say that he might as well have had the relevant perverse motive. Take the example, 'Man is born free'. We found that it was reasonable to interpret it as an attempt to influence people towards a respect for freedom. But this would have very little tendency to show that this was in fact Rousseau's motive - indeed it is fairly doubtful whether he had any idea what his motives were. But if on investigation we found that he was honestly trying to prove some forthright thesis, this would likewise have little tendency to show that we were mistaken in thinking that the most sense-making interpretation of what he said was to a different effect. There is no necessary relation between what one wants to say, and what one does say.

But this also shows that the intention of the speaker will not supply the criterion either. One could set out to persuade, and succeed in proving; and even where one sets out to prove, this is also persuasion, though perhaps in a different sense. If the intention of the author were the criterion, then we could never decide, from inspecting

the argument itself, what sort of argument it was, - and this will not do. We must surely make judgments about things in the light of their own characteristics.

I think the difficulty here derives almost entirely from the fact that we have been assuming that whatever the criteria are, they must apply equally or in the same way to the intention of the arguer, and to the argument itself; and that therefore the answer lies in having two sets of criteria, one for arguments and one for intentions. These may be closely related, but not in the simple analytical way in which from one, the other can be deduced. You might say of arguments, for example, that they were instances of justification if they exactly proved what they set out to prove, without reliance on merely accidental factors, such as the beliefs or feelings of those to whom they may be directed, or, (if they failed in this), did not fail in any of the ways which could be identified as one of the known forms of non-justification; that they are persuasive if they rely on any important respect on the idiosyncrasies of those to whom they are directed; that they are cases of 'influence' if their conclusion is a matter of conjecture, and if no conclusion of the type to be expected in the context can be said to actually follow from the ideas expressed; and that they are rationalization if, whether they are good arg-

uments or bad, they do not tally with the author's actual reasons for accepting the conclusions he is advocating.

One is tempted to say that the corresponding criteria for making judgments about the authors of arguments would be, which of the above states of affairs they in fact intended, regardless of what they actually achieved. But this does not altogether work, because (a) one very commonly has no conscious intention as one goes about talking philosophically, and (b) while in none of the first three cases would it be in any way surprising that a person should so intend, it is almost logically impossible to consciously intend to rationalize, because the awareness that one was doing so would deprive one of the conviction which the procedure was contrived to produce or sustain. But I think that rather than invalidating the above suggestion, these considerations serve to show either that there are some circumstances in which one is estopped from making judgments about the authors of arguments, or that there are some cases in which the judgment must be made, not on the basis of the facts immediately surrounding the making of the argument, but on general information about the arguer.

There are two types of uncertainty which the existence of any of these maladies (where they do exist) may



indicate, - uncertainty about which state of affairs actually prevails in a given case, and uncertainty about whether what does prevail is good enough. If a person argues, for example, from a sometime state of affairs to a universal conclusion, he may not realize that this is if anything a persuasive argument; - but he may realize it, and think that this is good enough, that this is all that can be expected in a subject like ethics. Not everybody who behaves as if he held the latter view does explicitly hold it. But let us discuss it as a contention, rather than as a state of mind.

The first point to be made is that we must find some criteria for its use - some way of circumscribing its application, otherwise it could be used to justify any type of proceedings whatsoever, and ethics would become a subject in which 'anything goes'. I think that in practise it is used indiscriminately, and that this is not good enough.

And having said this, I cannot fail to make this second point: that there can really be no question of any abatement of standards; the only question there may be is, what alternatives to the obvious ideals of forthright speech, precision, comprehensiveness and valid argument are consistent with the highest standards? I say that I must say this, because the point I made in

the last paragraph amounts to nothing but a re-introduction of strict standards. But in case this seems insufficient substantiation for such an important thesis, I have two other arguments to offer.

The first derives from the empirical fact that when we make public a philosophical treatise, it passes from our hands. We have no control over whether it is read by stupid people, analytical philosophers, existentialists, twentieth century Christians, or any other special group; and we therefore cannot count on its being judged by any special or idiosyncratic standards. Nor can we lay down any special or arbitrarily chosen standards, unless they are deduced from, or entirely consistent with, standards which we think that everyone must necessarily accept. Or to put it a little differently, when something which claims to be true is released to the public, it immediately becomes caught up in the merry-go-round of public scrutiny; we cannot expect to fool all the people all the time; and when a good criticism appears, to say that the theory was not intended for people so acute as the author of the criticism is to abandon any claim it has to truth. (And to admit publicly that the theory was intended for stupid people is to abandon any use it has as persuasion, influence or whatever else it may then be regarded as attempting.)

But this is at best a picturesque way of saying what

may be more formally stated as follows: it is not in fact possible to discuss how high a standard to pursue for any purpose, because if the discussion is pitched to a high standard, then it will be a discussion of what sort of standards are consistent with the high standard of the discussion; while if the discussion proceeds on anything short of the highest standards, it will be necessary again to discuss how high a standard the discussion of the standards pertaining to the first-mentioned activity need adopt; - and once again the same choice between accepting the highest and discussing the alternative will arise. It seems therefore to be a choice between the strictest standards and eternal waffle, - an arbitrary choice, if you like, but at least one in which one of the alternatives is logically unassailable, since any criticism of it would presuppose what it was attempting to deny.

c/ If this proves, as I think it unmistakably does, that there can be no case for permitting ethics to be a logically sloppy subject, it still leaves unsettled, questions about what particular sorts of theoretical practise are consistent with the highest standards, - questions like 'What form of argument is appropriate?', 'Can we be content to say things which are true for the most part?', 'Can we settle for anything short of certainty?', 'Will

a rough outline of morals be sufficient?'. These questions I will now discuss.*

Some of the arguments which attempt to show that a high standard is not necessary in ethics merely serve to point out that a certain kind of argument is not appropriate; and some of the claims that no argument is appropriate to moral discourse rely on the assumption that a certain kind of argument would be appropriate, if any kind were. An example of the latter is Ayer's famous "Critique of Ethics" in "Language, Truth and Logic", where he shows, what had never been seriously doubted except by some particularly hard-working philosophers, - that moral propositions cannot be empirically founded; - and concludes, on the apparent assumption that this if any would be the appropriate method of founding them, that no justification of them is possible. It is not difficult to show that this is a poor argument. How does he know that

* Compare Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1094b: "Our treatment of this science will be adequate if it achieves the degree of accuracy appropriate to the subject. ... Questions of right and justice involve much difference of opinion and much uncertainty. ... Therefore we must be content to obtain not more than a rough outline of the truth, and to reach conclusions which...have merely a general validity. ...It is the mark of an educated mind to expect that degree of precision in each department which the nature of the subject allows: to demand rigorous demonstration from a political orator is on a par with accepting plausible probabilities from a mathematician."

empirical justification would be the appropriate method? Not because all (synthetic) knowledge is empirical. This is a generalization which could not stand together with his own conclusions about moral 'knowledge'. (And to claim, as part of the argument, that moral beliefs are not knowledge is to assume the final conclusion.) He would therefore have to show that empiricism was peculiarly appropriate to ethics. This could be done by showing that some ethical propositions are empirically provable. But this would run counter to the conclusion that none were.

The former sort of argument is more interesting. An example of its use appears in the passage from Aristotle just quoted. He there argues that we can expect neither precision nor certainty in ethics, because it is foolish to demand mathematical demonstration. In Aristotle's time this argument was no doubt more plausible than it is today, because then the only science in which precision or certainty was to be found was mathematics, and it was therefore reasonable to grade sciences on a scale in which differences of precision and certainty were the only significant differentia, and to say that what is non-mathematical must necessarily lack these characteristics. And yet even so it is not entirely reasonable, because one would have to be able to identify mathematical reasoning, (and any other kind, too), by other criteria than their

precision and certainty, otherwise the argument would be circular: 'This (imprecise and uncertain) science is imprecise and uncertain, because it is non-mathematical (i.e. not precise and not certain)'. But today the argument is even less plausible, because we have learned that precision and certainty are necessities in any science, and where these qualities are not evident on the surface, as in the hurly-burly of nature, we have found ways of seeking them out - as Kant says, of behaving, not like a pupil, but like "an appointed judge who compels the witnesses to answer questions which he has himself formulated".* To us, therefore, the non-mathematical nature of a science is no argument that it need be imprecise or uncertain. To us Aristotle's remarks can amount to nothing more than the observation that, however one reasons in morals, it is not the same as the kind of reasoning in mathematics. I shall have more to say about what form of argument is appropriate in Chapters Four and Five.

To investigate the second question, let us take as an object of discussion the proposition, 'It is true for the most part that we should not tell lies'. Let us suppose that "telling lies" has been sufficiently defined

* Critique of Pure Reason, Bxiii (Kemp Smith translation).

to remove danger of confusion as to which of its many meanings is intended; and that we are attempting to put this information to practical use. This is not to assume categorically that all such propositions must be practically useful; but we must have some point of view from which to interpret them, and this is the most natural from which to begin. Well now I am asked a question which I am expected to answer, and not knowing whether I should answer it truthfully, I refer to this piece of philosophical counsel. What does it advise? Tell the truth because it is more likely that this is the moral course? If I took this line in this case, I should have no reason not to take it in other cases, and would therefore tell the truth all the time, and thereby be led into the paths of wickedness. But I have no reason to lie some of the time. This might only compound my wickedness, since while on the first alternative I would certainly be wrong, say, ten per cent. of the time, I might now tell the truth when I should be lying and vice versa, and thus increase my percentage of sins anywhere up to twenty per cent. And for this reason it will not help if I go back to my philosopher friend and enquire of him, in what percentage of cases it is wrong to lie. If the percentage happened to be fifty, then it would be equally advisable for me always to lie, or always to tell the truth, since either way I could count on being right half the time, whereas

if I lied half the time and spoke the truth the other half, I might be wrong as much as all the time, although no doubt on the laws of chance it would work out the same as if I always lied or was always truthful. (Of course there are some conditions under which this kind of information would be valuable. If the proportion of times when one should be truthful were very high, and I had previously thought it was very low, or vice versa, it would almost certainly make for a net improvement in my behaviour. But such propositions are not addressed to particular people, and so cannot rely on individual cases to show that they make sense. And in any event, it is through their good fortune, not their intrinsic merit, that they are ever able to communicate valuable information - i.e. it is only when the percentage to which they refer happens to be very high or very low.)

In this example, through having less than a high standard of clarity, the proposition has succeeded in communicating either nothing, or virtually nothing. There are two kinds of implication which could be drawn from the above criticism. One is that philosophy was proceeding in an entirely wrong way in trying to propound generalities about morals, and that it should turn to something different, like elucidating a procedure for making up one's mind in particular cases. After all, when we gener-

alized, we must have generalized from something; and what could this be but the results of such a procedure in practice? This is the line a person could be expected to take who insisted that philosophy should be practical. But here is not the place to pursue this point. The other alternative is to say that the mistake is in the angle from which the proposition is viewed, - that such propositions are not intended as practical counsel, and should not be criticised as such; and that if any criticism is due in this connection, it is that the theory of which such propositions formed a part did not make this clear. This would raise the question, in what way then is the proposition to be regarded? 'As an answer to the purely theoretical question, how far is it true that we should not tell lies?', is a reply which immediately offers itself. But this will not do, because it tells us nothing. It is always possible to formulate some question to which a given proposition is an answer, and if this were the token, all propositions would be theoretically significant. What we should need to know in this case, I suppose, is where the question and its answer fitted into a larger theoretical context, and also in what way an answer as vague as the one in question could serve any useful theoretical purpose; and for my part I find either of these difficult to imagine.

But it is part of my present purpose neither to criticise this particular way of talking as such, nor to decide whether moral philosophy must be practical. Our question is, can the practise of saying things which are 'true for the most part' be made consistent with the highest standards of clarity? I think I have shown that, viewed from a practical point of view, it cannot, and that from a theoretical point of view, very extensive explanations of the place of such propositions in a system (which it is at present difficult to imagine) would be necessary before we could even begin to decide whether they conveyed any clear enlightenment. I have also shown that the attempt to render them precise by providing percentages is, at least from a practical point of view, profitless; and further, that what might appear a promising way out, - that of providing a procedure for making up one's mind in particular cases, is in fact not a clarification of true-for-the-most-part propositions, but an entirely different way of doing business.

It is an interesting, if not a very valuable point, that although restricted generality does not appear to achieve the required precision, complete particularity does. If it were ever possible to say 'It is certain that in these exact circumstances this is the right thing to do', I can see no possibility of mistaking the meaning

of the proposition, - and this may be one of the heady attractions of casuistry. But on the other hand, its usefulness, I should think, would be restricted to circumstances identical with those represented, and this might in practice amount to nil.

The criteria I have used here are that a proposition is acceptable from the point of view of clarity if it (a) contains some unmistakeable enlightenment, and (b) creates no positive confusion. I have taken it that there would never be any temptation to leave a proposition unclear as to what in Chapter One I called its 'intrinsic meaning'. The problem of expressing oneself is always a personal one, and I cannot think under what circumstances any difficulty in this regard could be attributed to the nature of the idea. If it is a difficult idea to express, either I am the man for the job or I am not; and if ~~it is~~ the latter, the only graceful thing to do is to talk about something else.

Consider now the following propositions:

- (i) It is probable that it is true for the most part that we should tell the truth.
- (ii) It is probable that we should always tell the truth.
- (iii) The probability that it should be true that we should tell the truth in any given case is $7/8$.
- (iv) The probability is $3/4$ that it is true that we should tell the truth in seven cases out of eight.

- (v) The probability is that the average Englishman will die at age 58.7.

Our primary interest in these will be to the extent that they mark a difference between probability and certainty, as distinct from what I shall call an 'objective probability'; and we shall be concerned to discover how far the saying of them is consistent with the highest theoretical standards. But with a view to focussing attention on the particular sort of probability in which we are interested, I would like to point out some of the interesting differences between these five statements. The most general of these is the difference between being less than entirely sure of the truth of what is being said, and saying something which is regarded as being by nature uncertain or indeterminable. The former meaning is most evident in propositions (i), (ii) and (iv), - the latter in (iii) and (v). We most commonly think that we are sure of the uncertainty of things which are 'objectively' or 'by nature' uncertain, and it is perhaps for this reason that propositions (i) and (iv) sound a bit odd. This is so also, I think, because we are not always very clear about the distinction between being less than sure, and making representations about objective uncertainties, and these two propositions force the distinction upon our attention. But lest there be any temptation to think that it does not make sense to say e.g. 'It is probable that it is true for the most part that...', I

think this query will be seen to be ill-taken if we say the same thing in different words. It does seem to make sense to say 'I am not sure, but it does seem to me that it is true for the most part that...'; - or at least the way in which it does not make sense is that it seems unnecessary to say that one is unsure of something which is itself so vague. If we make what is asserted more precise, - if we say 'I am not sure, but I think the probability is $7/8$ that...', then the profession of uncertainty no longer seems unnecessary.

'Subjective' or epistemological uncertainties are most commonly expressed in the words 'it is probable that', while objective uncertainties invite the phrase, 'the probability is that'; but neither expression can by any means be used as a criterion. I can use 'the probability is that' to mean 'I am not sure, but I think that'; and there are circumstances in which, when a person says 'It is probable that...', it makes sense to ask, 'What are the chances?'

It sounds odd to express epistemological uncertainty in a mathematical form, as in proposition (iv): 'The probability is $3/4$ that it is true that...', but this is not because we do not feel different degrees of assurance about our assertions, - degrees which can be expressed approximately in mathematical fractions, but rather because

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there is no imaginable procedure by which we could settle an argument as to whether ^{or} degree of assurance in a given case was $3/4$, or $25/32$.

A universal mark of an objective probability is that, given that we know precisely what we mean in asserting it, it is always possible to imagine conditions under which we could be completely certain of its truth. (We of course cannot be certain of anything of which we do not precisely know the meaning). In proposition (v), for example, you might say that the meaning was such that it implied that if one used the information it provided as a basis of insuring enough people's lives, one could count on not losing money; and although we do not normally take it that we are entirely sure of the truth of such statements, we can conceive how we could make them certain, or at least increase their certainty. We could on the one hand check and re-check the statistical methods used in reaching the conclusion, make further empirical investigations, etc., and on the other we could write insurance policies in such a way as to provide against unforeseeable changes in life expectancy, - for example by specifying that we would pay only if death were due to the kind of causes of death operating at the time our statistics were formulated. Similarly we can know quite clearly ~~clearly~~ what we mean by assertions about the roll of dice, flipping of coins, etc., which primarily depend

on the "laws of chance", and thus have a clear prospect of being sure of the probabilities to which we refer.

But in many cases, for example horse-racing probabilities, we do not entirely know what we mean by our assertions, and to this extent they tend to be partly subjective and partly objective in character. You might say that the difference between dice and horse-racing probability propositions is that in the former cases, the probabilities themselves are borne out by rolling dice, while the result of a horse race neither confirms nor de-confirms the antecedent probabilities. This may be only because rolls of dice are repeatable, horse races are not, and one roll of the dice does not confirm the probability alleged concerning it. But you could not quite make horse racing propositions into dice rolling propositions by saying that by a probability of the former kind you meant that if the same race were repeated enough times, horse X would be found to win proportion Y of the races, partly because betting on races does make sense even when it is known that the race will be run only once (and indeed would not make the same kind of sense otherwise), and partly because there are too many factors entering into horse racing to make it an entirely legitimate hypothesis that the race should be repeated.

There is more analogy between proposition (iii) and

life expectancy cases than there is between it and either dice rolling or horse racing cases, because given a way of deciding in particular instances whether one should lie or not, it would be a question of competent collection and interpretation of statistics, to determine the probability; and it is imaginable that one could be at least as sure as one's confidence in the said criterion allowed, of conclusions so reached as one could be of life expectancy conclusions. (The way you would proceed, I presume, would be by analysing the circumstances in which there was any occasion to speak into as many distinct types as possible, then, employing the criterion to ascertain what the result would be in each type of case, and then conducting an empirical investigation into the relative frequency with which each type of case occurs, and collating the results.) This kind of conclusion could be turned into one of type (iv), amongst other ways, through an assessment of the doubtfulness of the criterion employed, or through raising queries about the analysis of cases, or the sufficiency of empirical investigation.

Most 'objective' probability propositions arise when we take some categorical proposition having reference to a large number of cases, and try to conjecture what significance this has for a particular case falling into the same class as the cases to which the categorical propos-

ition has reference; and I suppose that this applies even to horse racing probabilities, since though a given set of horses may never have raced together before, and may never do so again, still each horse has run before, and individual statistics on its performance are available, and may be compared with similar information about other horses.

This has perhaps been a needlessly elaborate discussion for my purpose, which has been to provide some ways of distinguishing between subjective and objective probabilities, in order to focus attention on the former, ~~with~~ which we are here primarily interested, having provided some discussion of the latter in connection with 'things which are true for the most part'.

I shall now ask in what sense an ethical proposition which is represented as being probably true (in the subjective, epistemological or "we can't be quite sure" sense), can be practically useful. In the first place, obviously if it is used as if it is definitely true, then it will have whatever usefulness can be found in the proposition so taken (which may, as we saw, be none). But I point this out mainly because I think there is a tendency to invite people to accept as definitely true, what is thought and even represented by us as being merely probable. But this is to obscure or ignore the probability; and the question

we want to ask is, how does the recognition of it affect the usefulness of a probable proposition?

There are circumstances in which we can accommodate our behaviour to the recognition of probability, for example when we bet on games, races or life expectancies, or when we take along an umbrella in spite of a prediction of fine weather. And there are less obvious cases too: if I receive incorrect change from a shopkeeper, I may think it probable in view of the look in his eye that it was a dishonest mistake. But, it being only probable, I might act neither as if it were true nor as if it were untrue, but in a way which expressed my willingness to entertain either possibility, but my slight preference for the former. Or, to take a case in which it makes more sense to attempt to do more than recover one's losses as gracefully as possible, consider the usual course of criminal proceedings, in which, when there are sufficient grounds for suspicion, the accused is arrested and a preliminary hearing held to determine whether his guilt is sufficiently probable to warrant a trial. But the police no doubt entertain hearty suspicions about masses of people whom they are not prepared to arrest; and many people are discharged after a preliminary hearing because the probability is insufficient, although they might be guilty, and there is perhaps more likelihood of this in their case than in the case of a man picked at random off the streets.

Thus increasing shades of probability warrant increasing definiteness of treatment. And so forth.

Is there any analogy to be drawn between these cases and the probability of the truth of a purely moral proposition? An obvious difference is that in the above examples there is a real, or at least a distinctly conceivable prospect of being proven wrong. This is what makes the idea of risk which they all involve intelligible. This is clearest in the case of predictive probabilities like the weather, where it would not make sense to try to follow an intelligent course of action unless some denouement were anticipated, - in this case, unless it was thought that it will certainly be either wet or dry, hot or cold, etc. In the final two examples, which you might call sincerity cases because of the absence of any important element of prediction, the action taken in the light of probability again would not make sense if you did not think that something definite was the case, - that the mistake was either intentional or not intentional, that the accused either did or did not abscond with the missionary society funds. Or is it a difference? You might say that when a probability is alleged concerning a purely moral matter, there is an actuality to which it has reference - that this actuality is not too unlike the present actuality of a past action, or that we shall someday be confronted with what we now see only through a glass,

darkly. Either some form of Platonism, that is to say, or Christianity might supply the missing element here. But even if the representations which either of them made were true, I think they would not do the job required of them, for this reason: in the shopkeeper and criminal cases, we assess the probability largely in the light of our general information about similar occurrences. 'If the shopkeeper's mistake was not honest, then he could be expected to be disagreeable, or aloof, or over-apologetic, etc. when it was pointed out to him, or to contradict himself under questioning, or to say implausible things, etc., (since this is the way people in general do respond in such circumstances, and since in general our imagination functions less efficiently than our memory). This shopkeeper did respond in this, that and the other of these ways; therefore it is probable that his mistake was not honest.' Without such general information, we should have no intelligent grounds for an opinion in a particular case. Now if moral probabilities were approximations to some existing but non-accessible truth, some truth which is not only not now, but never accessible, we should have no general information upon which to base our judgments of probability; and consequently if it was still true to say that we could intelligently make them, it would also be true that the representations made by the Christian or the Platonist, (even if they too were true), would be irrel-

evant. Or it might be put differently by saying that to save an analogy of this sort two conditions must be fulfilled: (i) something must be said which would be relevant if it were true, and (ii) there must be some further ground for thinking it true than the fact that if it were true, it would save the analogy. In this instance if the first condition is fulfilled, (which I have claimed not to be the case), the second is not, and could not be, at least on this side of the grave.

But I have perhaps not yet put my finger on the essential point here, which is that in cases of probabilities about states of affairs, the reason one can alter or modulate one's behaviour according to the probability, take intelligent risks, etc., is that these propositions make no direct claim upon our behaviour. To say 'It is likely to rain' is not to say 'Take your umbrella', or 'Stay at home today', or any other instruction to do anything; and this allows us extensive freedom in the implications we permit it to have. But a moral proposition speaks directly about behaviour, and therefore gives an air of contradiction to any tampering with it. 'We should never tell lies' provides unmistakeable direction for our behaviour; but when this is prefaced by 'It is probable that', the position is not so clear. If we become entirely truthful, we treat the matter as if it were not probable, but certain.

But what else can one intelligently do? There is as much reason, in the circumstances, for telling lies some of the time as for telling half-truths all the time; and there is no reason for either, because each runs directly counter to what is supposed to be 'probably true'.

For these reasons I think that from a practical point of view it can make no difference to recognize an ethical proposition as merely probable, and that they must therefore either be treated as certain, - which cannot be allowed, if they are not so, - or be disallowed from having practical application. With regard to the latter alternative, I think it must be said that the only way to follow it is to talk about something else. One cannot say 'We should not tell lies, but I don't mean you to act on this', any more than one can say 'I am throwing this stone straight at you, but I don't intend it to hit you'.

This is a convenient, if not an entirely appropriate place to mention that the kind of statements we have been discussing are most instructively to be conceived as generalizations, reached in somewhat the following manner: beginning with a procedure for deciding whether or not to tell the truth, we apply it to all the cases upon which we can lay our hands in which there is any occasion to speak, and finding that the same result appears in all cases, but not being entirely sure that we have covered all

possible cases, we say 'It is probably true that we should never lie'. I will not say that this is the only procedure for arriving at such a conclusion, nor that part of the uncertainty about it might not derive from uncertainty about the way of deciding with which we began. But with these reservations it does seem an entirely appropriate method; and were this our way of proceeding, I wonder why we would embark on so unrewarding a project, rather than simply let the matter rest with an elucidation of the way of deciding about truth-telling which we were employing? From the point of view of moral enlightenment, one is no better off with a prognosis of how often he can expect his decisions to turn out in a given way, than he is when provided with a way of discovering this for himself (if it should concern him to do so).

So far I have argued (i) that in enunciating moral propositions neither less-than-complete generality nor less-than-complete certainty is consistent with a high standard of clarity; (ii) that attempts to maintain clarity by making degrees of generality or certainty precise are either fruitless, or if fruitful, represent not a qualification of the original statement, but a quite different way of doing business; (iii) that complete particularity can in principle be entirely clear, but is of little value; and (iv) that the issue cannot be evaded by

saying that it is a mistake to insist on a practical interpretation of practical propositions. If they are not intended to be practically useful, this can only be taken as a wildly idiosyncratic fact about their author. I have also suggested that it may be a mistake to attempt the kind of generalizations we have been discussing, - that it might be a more direct and informative procedure to elucidate some of the reasoning (if any) upon which they are based.

If there is any direction in which we may settle for less than the obvious ideal, it would appear to be in respect of comprehensiveness. If we could ever have good grounds for saying, for example, 'The wise man is at least without fear, hope or pity', 'Right actions are, whatever else they may be, done from a sense of duty', - these propositions plainly lack comprehensiveness, but still appear to satisfy the criteria, both of contributing definite enlightenment, and creating no positive confusion. Some Idealist philosophers would say that this cannot be the case, - that in all cases the things which remained unsaid would, if said, shift the meaning of the things that were said, and that we can therefore never be in possession of the final meaning until we have painted the whole picture. I think there is little doubt that it is often the case that such shifts of meaning occur; but on the one hand I can see no reason for affirming it as a universal

truth, and on the other, I think there may be some case for saying that in any event it is possible to begin with the final meaning. After all, the writer of philosophy is not discovering as he goes; - it is only of the reader that this may be said. One knows where one is going before one begins writing. It is true that one learns many things on the way, because until we write we have not ordinarily been sufficiently precise in our thinking to make possible an adequate assessment of what we have to say. But if we learn anything radical, we can only tear up what we have done and start again; and thus once again we know where we are going before we begin.

This does not go all the way to solve the difficulty, however, because if I know no more than I am prepared to expound philosophically, then the things I do not know might yet, if known, shift the meanings of what I already possess. But in moral philosophy, (as I shall maintain in Chapter Four), we do know more than we are prepared to express philosophically. We are contemplating moral experience, which on the one hand is not entirely susceptible of philosophical treatment, and on the other, is too extensive and complex a thing, even where it is so susceptible, to leave it either feasible or profitable to attempt to represent it entirely in our theories. But it is there, and being there, can supply for us this worrisome residue.

Otherwise, we are left with a counsel of grim despair. Either we know or we do not know (in the lofty sense of 'know') what we say. If we do, then we are entitled to say it. But if everything we think we know is still subject to these dark suspicions, and must await their removal before we say anything, I see no prospect of ever being in a position conscientiously to say anything whatever.

My discussion of the question of standards would be incomplete if I did not make a specific point of what I have remarked elsewhere, - that nothing which can be interpreted only as an attempt to influence people, from the propounding of myths in Plato's sense, to saying things like 'Man is born free', can be reconciled with any serious philosophical standards. The reason for this is that the aim or import of such theories is not specified, and in the absence of anything but conjecture as to what is being claimed, it is altogether impossible to make any assessment of its truth. In various places I have expressed suspicions as to how extensive this kind of philosophising is; and I think there are some good explanations of why it is so seductive.

In the first place, for reasons which I shall discuss in the following chapter, we have a very strong aversion for anything which savours of casuistry, and we therefore do not like to be explicitly casuistical. But the desire

to communicate one's thoughts about morals is not only difficult to suppress, - it is excruciating to try to find something which one can reasonably call 'moral philosophy', which is entirely devoid of any moral enlightenment. It is therefore only to be expected that moral ideas should find covert expression in fine fancies, deep obscurities, shock treatments, psychological explanations, and all the rest.

But there are explanations which make it a more honest mistake than this. Moral experience is an immensely complex and intangible affair, which is only with the greatest difficulty reducible to anything which we can clearly and confidently assert. Time and again the things one tries to say need only be mentioned to appear absurd, inadequate, one-sided or incommensurate with the material; and yet this difficulty has ordinarily little tendency to reduce our confidence in the genuineness of the business. It is therefore only too easy to slip into saying what is sufficiently vague to do no violence to the subject, yet sufficiently expressive to make it appear worth saying. This is the explanation which I would prefer to think was more often correct.

Chapter Three.

In this chapter I wish to discuss the question, Can ethics be practical? I put the question thus vaguely because there are, as we saw in Chapter One, many degrees and modes of moral enlightenment, and I do not wish to exclude any of them. I am not merely asking, Can philosophy tell people what to do? - but also, Can it tell them how to think? Can it criticise their actions or thoughts? or say things which, if accepted, could constitute a criticism of the moral thinking or behaviour of people? Can it represent facts from which one would ordinarily draw moral inferences ('The West' is declining - then we must do something about it)? - or in general can philosophy say anything which is either intended to make a moral difference, or is such that it might as well have been so intended?

The question, can ethics be practical? could be read as an empirical question, like 'Does it ever make a difference in a person's moral outlook to take a course in ethics?' And it could be a question asked from a student's point of view in a more interesting way - it could mean 'Would a student be making a philosophical mistake if he allowed philosophy to influence his behaviour?'

But I am asking it from a philosopher's point of view: would we philosophers be making a mistake if we contrived to say things which were in some way morally enlightening? There appear to be two kinds of consideration which might induce us to answer this question in the affirmative. One has to do directly with the standards we discussed in the first two chapters - it might happen to be the case that moral ideas were not susceptible of clear statement, or adequate justification; and in such an event whoever agreed with me that such standards were necessary would say that ethics cannot be practical. But this would not ordinarily be a judgment which would serve as a rule in ethics, because it would be merely descriptive of the results of our efforts so far; and unless there was an argument that moral ideas were intrinsically incapable of such clear and well-substantiated statement, we would be quite entitled to consider it still an open possibility that ethics should be practical. For my part, I see no prospect of such an argument emerging, and I therefore propose to discuss the question on rather different terms, which might be described as direct or internal arguments that ethics should not be practical.

As things now stand in philosophy, there is a very hard rule against any tendency to be morally instructive. It is one of the first things a student of the subject is

taught; and while students are slow to assimilate the rule, old hands are in general so thoroughly bound over to it that they feel the greatest personal embarrassment when they detect any tendency on their part to be casuistical. We go to the most elaborate lengths to find something to say which is both ethical and non-practical; and our passion for this thing is at times so intense that we have even been known to claim that philosophers like Aristotle, Kant and Mill had no casuistical intentions, and it is a mistake to ask what is the practical significance of their views. (This is surely unnecessary - we could simply maintain that they were mistaken. And I think the reason we do not do this is partly that we have no very good arguments to advance to that effect, and partly that having no arguments and feeling that we need them, we try to concoct historical precedents. But authority has never been a good argument in philosophy.)

I said that we have no arguments, but what I should have said is that we have few or none that we are prepared to advance in a confident or categorical way, - for one does find scattered and tentative (one might almost say) excuses for the rule against being casuistical. And for my part, when I examine my own feelings on the matter, I find quite a welter of anxieties about it, all of which have a tendency to make me agree with the rule, some of

which I would be prepared to put on paper, but most of which, for varying reasons, I would very much prefer simply to keep private and confidential. And I suspect I am not alone in this peculiarity.

Because it is with this state of affairs as a background that the question must be discussed, we should not be surprised if some of the issues undertaken appear tenuous, improbable or embarrassing.

There appear first of all to be some moral arguments against being casuistical in ethics. It interferes with the freedom of the individual, to tell him how he must behave; it is part of his moral worth to decide such things for himself; he must be responsible, not only for his actions, but also for his principles. "The questions, 'What shall I do?' and 'What moral principles shall I adopt?' must be answered By each man for himself; that at least is part of the connotation of the word 'moral'."*

*P.H. Nowell-Smith, Ethics, Pelican Books, 1954. It is interesting that while Mr. Nowell-Smith postulates this as a principle for philosophers to respect, he appears quite content that other people should violate it most flagrantly, and indeed appears in places to think that it is only when interpreted as attempts to force our will on other people, that our moral judgments make sense. (See especially Chapter 20, section (4).)

Commendable though it may be, it is not difficult to see why this type of argument seldom becomes explicit in philosophy, - it is contradictory to employ moral principles as the basis of an argument that we cannot in philosophy affirm moral principles. There can therefore be no universal moral argument against ethics being practical.

And yet it is not as simple as this: if we took it that this argument established our liberty to be casuistical and thereupon set to work, we might in the process of doing ethics find ourselves affirming one or other of the above moral principles, and thence see that the very affirmation of it ran counter to what was affirmed; - that, for example, in telling people that we must all respect the liberty of the individual, we were at the same time failing to respect their liberty; or if we affirmed the liberty principle, and also maintained that we should not tell lies, in making the latter contention we were contravening the former principle. That is to say, although there can be no general moral argument against being 'practical', there might still be particular arguments depending on the particular moral principles we chose to affirm. One might get around this by systematically avoiding the mention of any principle which had such awkward tendencies. But this would be the merest subterfuge; and if one privately held the relevant prin-

ciples, one would at least be violating one's own conscience, even if this fact was kept hidden from the public.

But there are three lines of thought which seem to bear on the problem as thus formulated. The first is that it may just be one of the facts about some moral principles, that one cannot think them without giving rise to some sort of contradiction, or at any rate, muddle. It is hard to be against intolerance, for example, without being intolerant of it; and one cannot be in favor of a respect for freedom without wanting to restrict people's freedom not to respect freedom. It may be that such difficulties can be cleared up by some careful thinking; but the important point, I think, is that they are not peculiarly philosophical worries. Anyone who thinks these thoughts brings these difficulties upon himself, and they therefore do not provide a special reason for philosophers not to think them.

The second consideration is that not every way of being casuistical has the same tendency to restrict freedom, rob people of their proper responsibilities, etc. 'Pure' casuistry, in the way I have defined it, "taking all the brain work out of the moral life", is an extreme case of removing individual responsibility, while the 'Greatest Happiness Principle' would presumably arrogate responsibility only

for decisions of principle, and things which are less specific, like Bradley's talk about 'my station and its duties', are even less interfering. But I am not altogether sure of the value of these remarks, because on these grounds it would still appear that the way to increase one's moral respectability is through decreasing what one actually says, with the ultimate respectability accruing to the person who says nothing. And to the extent that it is doubtful whether being vague or ambiguous is a legitimate way of being morally upright, it would appear that the minimum transgression would be gained by confining one's talk to decisions of principle.

The third consideration, however, seems to settle the matter more satisfactorily. It lies in the difference between being authoritarian and being rational or argumentative. I presume that no one would say that individual freedom or responsibility was in any way at stake where one person requests another's assent to a proposition in geometry, physics or psychology; because he is not ordered, advised, urged or beguiled into accepting it, but rather presented with what purport to be suitable and sufficient grounds for making his own (free and responsible) decision. It is understood in such transactions that if the still doubtful person desires further information or explanation it is something to which he is entirely entitled, and that

if it is not forthcoming, (at least in cases where it cannot be shown to be an unjustified request), then he is no longer to be expected to accept the conclusion. The only sense in which he is not free is that if he simply pays no attention, or if he says 'Yes, I see that you have a perfectly conclusive argument, but I will not accept it', we feel that he is a fool or a ne'er-do-well, and that he ought either to accept it, or at least to profess nothing which implied that it was mistaken. That is to say, the only time his responsibility is not respected is when he does not behave with responsibility.

I think that if moral philosophy conducted its business on terms similar to these, it would be entitled, at least from the point of view of the moral considerations we have been discussing, to say anything which it found to be susceptible of this kind of treatment, not excluding casuistry. But by the same token, if moral principles were found not to be so susceptible, anyone who believed the appropriate moral tenets (e.g. about personal responsibility) would have good personal grounds for making his ethical theorising non-practical. (But I wonder whether, if morals were non-rational, it would matter? To claim that he was acting against his moral principles would be to bring a rational criticism against him; and could he

not reply that this was inappropriate, since morals were not a sphere where this kind of procedure was valid?)

There is another, perhaps unclassifiable type of anxiety which one sometimes feels about this question. 'Who am I,' one may ask, 'to instruct you how to conduct your life?' The implication is that if I were somebody special, like God, St. Peter or President Eisenhower, it might be in order for me to do this, but since I am only me..... Or perhaps it is that morals are such a fine and holy thing that it is sacreligious to suppose that mere people know anything about them. Or again perhaps it is that people, those stout, empirical, real beings one sees on buses, know about such things, but philosophers are... well, they're not like people. Perhaps there is some way of explaining the matter which shows that there is a genuine difficulty here. Whatever it might be, I think there is a very good answer to the question 'Who am I?', - or one which would be very good, if it were true, - and that is, 'I am somebody who knows. It may be that other people know too, or that some people merely opine, or even that everybody knows. But none of this detracts from the fact that I, in any event, possess the perfect qualification for speaking authoritatively about anything, that is, to know something about it. And I can show that I know something about it by presenting my knowledge in

the rational or argumentative form which is the only criterion by which we human beings can decide whether a state of knowledge prevails.' In short, the solution of this difficulty is the same as for the previous one: if we can do moral theory in a rational manner, the problem vanishes.

Quite a different kind of argument derives from the reflection that ethics, whatever it tries to do, can be expected to be a rational investigation. This implies, for one thing, that it cannot assume what it is trying to prove; and from this can be deduced that it cannot use moral criteria as the grounds of its conclusions. The argument then says, 'Therefore it cannot be the business of ethics to pronounce moral verdicts'. The only condition under which this conclusion would follow would be if moral criteria were the only possible ones for settling moral questions. But it is by no means obvious that this is the case. It is not the case in other disciplines. We do not employ the conclusions of physics as their own criteria, nor of mathematics, psychology or history; and yet we do conduct tolerably respectable rational investigations in these sciences. It cannot therefore be merely because in ethics we cannot use moral criteria, that there can be no science of ethics. It would depend also on the proposition that there can be no other criteria.

But it is strange that we should say 'also', and not 'entirely' here, because in any other context it would scarcely need mentioning, that we cannot use the conclusion of an investigation as its own criterion. Why does this need mentioning in an ethical context? I think the reason is partly the acute temptation we are all under, to make philosophy merely the vehicle for the expression of our own moral views (in the doing of which we would embrace a theory which appeared to say morally good things, and reject those which appeared to say wicked things, thus using moral criteria); and partly the absence of any established alternative procedure for settling moral questions. The fact that we do naturally tend to use moral criteria, combined with the fact that we know no others, leads us to think that they are the only ones possible. But this could not be regarded as an argument to that effect.

What we are most often given as an argument that in ethics moral criteria are the only ones is the point that in most sciences we have empirical criteria, but in morals, none. This would be a strong argument, I suppose, if it were the case that moral philosophy were the same sort of first-order discipline that, say, physics is. But if we make the probably more appropriate comparison between physics and actual moral deliberations, we find that

ethical thought is (if we must have them), not without its empirical criteria. In empirical sciences we say 'I will not believe P if C is not the case (since "P is true" implies that C is the case).' Here we have made "what is the case" decisive of what we believe; but we have done so on a principle for which there is no empirical evidence, - the principle that if 'P is true' implies that 'C' is the case, and C is not the case, then P is not true. Compare this now with 'I will not blame Jones unless he is guilty'. Here again we have made what is the case decisive of what we do, but again we have done so on a principle for which there can be no empirical substantiation, - the principle that we will not blame anyone who has not in fact done the deed in question. One might object that of course there are immense differences; but there are differences too between the way we think in physics and the way we think in psychology, and between both of these and the way we think in history; and the differences are not greater than we would be led to expect from the characteristically different problem involved. You may say that in the ethical case, there is nothing to tell us that we should ever blame anyone; but neither is there anything to tell us we should ever believe anything. And likewise if you say there is nothing to tell us we should blame a person if he did a certain deed, - there

is also nothing to tell us we should believe 'P' if 'C' is the case. There is a background necessary to the thinking in both examples. What is chiefly upsetting about the comparison is that other types of thinking have as their goal some sort of abstract theory, while first-order moral thinking has as its goal virtuous behaviour. One might take a pragmatist line to show that they were actually not so unlike in this respect, - that the ultimate goal of science was also some form of behaviour. But I am not so in love with the analogy as to undertake so desperate a measure. No good purpose would be served by so blurring a distinction; and the most that I am anxious to maintain is that in moral experience there takes place a form of genuine thinking, upon which it is just as appropriate for philosophers to meditate as it is for them to reflect on the thinking in other areas of experience.

Another argument that ethics cannot be practical is this: if ethics is defined as the business of convincing people that they should behave in some specified way, then it assumes that this is the right way to behave, and this again runs counter to the idea of philosophy as a kind of investigation. No investigation assumes what it is attempting to prove. But this too is a mistake, and it can again best be seen to be so by a comparison with science. Physics is something which attempts to convince people of its

conclusions, but it could not be defined as an attempt to convince people of any specific conclusions. It is not, for example, the study of how to convince people of the 'law of universal gravitation', - for then a further science would be necessary to discover this and other laws. But it could be said to be its business to prove to people whatever, in its sphere of interest, is found to be provable. And if the same were said of ethics, no problem would arise. But perhaps this does not quite meet the difficulty, which lies in the rather curious identification of 'being practical' with convincing people of something specified in advance. I think this identification can partly be explained by the fact that morals existed before any particular moral philosopher began his meditations, and we are therefore tempted to think that he is only rationalizing what is already there (specified in advance). But this consideration has no logical tendency to bind a philosopher to agree with what is generally believed, or to prevent him from saying things which are new and different; - and in any case it does make a significant difference to know something, as distinct from merely having an opinion about it. In spite of the fact that it has always been believed in my family that the world is round, my youthful assent to this proposition when I was first introduced to the arguments upon which it is based, can be regarded as a piece of perfectly genuine, if low-order

rational thinking, not merely as a rationalization of a view which I would have held whether I thought it out or not. And there are cases, too, in which pre-existing beliefs have been raised to the level of science. There were helio-centric and atomic theories before ever they became knowledge, and there has probably never been a scientific theory propounded with respect to which there did not pre-exist some view, either in agreement or disagreement.

But perhaps it is not as simple as this, - there is a deep inclination to think that it is acceptable enough for mere scientific views to be mistaken. They do not matter. But it does matter if people's ethical views are mistaken. The world would be all wrong if there were much possibility of this. (It is unthinkable that for centuries people should have been consigned to hell in droves, merely because no philosopher had yet appeared, smart enough to set them straight.) Yet if there is some sense in this, the way I have expressed it is both exaggerated and unrealistic. It is unrealistic because if there is a hell, one can say without aid of moral knowledge that people have in fact been consigned there in droves. One has only to survey the disagreement, indecision, indifference and rebelliousness towards morals which have always prevailed to know this. If this means that there is something "all

wrong" about the world, then there just is something all wrong about it. And it is exaggerated, because to say that there is a possibility of knowing as distinct from opining in morals makes no prognosis whatever about how right or wrong past generations may be seen to be when such knowledge is acquired.

I hope I will not appear to be flaying the subject too hard if I advance two more conjectures as to why this argument looks good. The first is that we tend to think that morals are so important that it cannot possibly matter what means of achieving conviction about moral questions are employed, so long as they produce results. And we therefore think that if anyone is interested in practical questions, he will always be found to employ all manner of bad reasoning, of which the question-begging here under discussion is only one instance. The perils of any kind of activity, however, are not usually a good argument for total abstinence.

My final conjecture is that some of us are so settled in the opinion that there can be no rational discussion of moral questions that we think it unnecessary to mention it in an argument of this sort; but it would follow from this that any attempt to purvey practical enlightenment would be unphilosophical. It would take more than a few deft strokes to defeat this assumption. Suffice it to say

that if it were granted, there would be no need to employ such a round-about argument as the one we have discussed, to show that ethics cannot be practical. To say that morals are irrational is the same thing as to say that no moral proposition can be philosophically established.

One final argument says that since moral propositions say something directly to people in a way that other propositions do not, there is a special necessity that people should be persuaded of them, and therefore all moral arguments are persuasive. Other propositions may make some claim upon one's assent ('This is true, and if you do not believe it, you are mistaken'), but they are about something else, and do not directly express concern whether people accept them. Moral propositions do directly express such concern, - they are about nothing other than what one should believe, - and are therefore inherently persuasive. (But persuasive arguments are not good enough for philosophy, and therefore philosophy cannot be practical.)

But again the answer is not far to seek: the technical definition of a persuasive argument is that it seeks to procure belief without more regard for logical respectability than is necessary to this end, and this is why it acquires and deserves no philosophical popularity. But not

all instances of persuading people are instances of the use of 'persuasive arguments'. Sometimes a good argument will persuade, and if philosophers confine themselves to the use of good arguments, no difficulty need arise. Sometimes, of course, only a bad argument will do the job; but in such cases there is no proper course for a philosopher but to abstain.

One scarcely knows how far it is either gracious or useful to explore the dark recesses of this issue; but I think I may take it that I have now removed all the more obvious general objections to being casuistical in philosophy. But whether or not I am right about this, there are two things I have not established: (i) I have not established that there is nothing standing in the way of this type of philosophy; - it will certainly happen that some casuistical things philosophers would like to say will not meet the required standards, and it might happen that all such things so failed. It might also happen that individual philosophers could not reconcile being casuistical with their own moral standards. But these are things which can only be decided ad hoc. (ii) I have not shown that moral philosophy must be casuistical. I take it that the conditions under which one could make this latter claim would be (a) if all conceivable ways of doing ethics could be shown to have casuistical uses, - that is to say,

if there are conditions under which the acceptance of their conclusions could logically make a moral difference; or (b) if nothing could be said to be a type of moral theory which did not involve or depend upon some moral assumptions. The most obvious way in which this condition could be satisfied would be if it could be shown that the only adequate way of distinguishing moral science from others like history, anthropology, psychology, etc., was by reference to some form of moral criteria. But neither of the conditions is easily fulfilled: if a way of doing ethics which had no casuistical uses were suggested, there would be a temptation to say it can not really be ethics, because ethics by definition has casuistical uses; and similarly with the question of whether a type of theory involved moral assumptions. It would appear, therefore, that in order respectably to consider the problem, it would be necessary to have some independent criterion of what constitutes an instance (a genuine instance) of ethical theory. But on the other hand, if one were thereby enabled to reach the conclusion that ethics must be casuistical, then this would itself become a criterion of 'genuine' ethical theory. For my part, I cannot think what other criteria would be either less arbitrary or more appropriate, and to this extent I would be inclined to let the matter rest with the bald assertion that this

is the fundamental difference between ethics and other kinds of investigation. But such an assertion might be met with such a reply as, 'There are masses of instances in the history of ethics of theories lacking all practical import, and although there may be no way of showing that these are in fact genuine instances of moral theorising, still it would be too arbitrary and paradoxical, to maintain, merely on the ground that they had no practical import, that they were not in fact ethical theory'; and in view of this I am bound at least to give some examples of the way such theories do in fact have practical import.

First, one or two examples of theories which have casuistical uses. We all tend to think that it is a matter of no great consequence how we use words, as long as they are used intelligently and not deliberately misused for purposes of deception, concealment, etc., and we therefore suppose that there can be no casuistical overtones in any project to analyse moral language. And yet in the process two sorts of thing are found to happen: the 'analysis' contains a message of direct moral interest; or it is indirectly casuistical in the sense that it represents or bespeaks a special moral outlook. An example of the former is Mr. Nowell-Smith's analysis of 'advising'*.

* In Ethics, Chapter Two.

where he says, amongst other interesting things, that 'advice' is addressed to a free, rational agent who can accept or reject it, and that it is offered as a solution to the problem of the person to whom it is given (rather than as an expression of the tastes, moral opinions, etc., of the giver of it). If everyone behaved as if he understood this, it might not be so obvious that it constitutes a piece of direct moral enlightenment. But it is not universally recognized, and there are many conditions under which 'seeing it' could make important practical differences. (Of course 'seeing it' is probably not analysable as "coming to understand that this is what 'advising' means", but rather as "coming to realize that where a situation occurs which can amongst other ways be described as 'my being asked for advice', the intelligent or rational way to respond to it is a way which respects the other person's freedom, and tries to solve his problem". Is it not stretching a point to say that the word 'advise' plays any but an accidental role in this bit of business?)

An example of being indirectly casuistical is the analysis of 'ought words' as 'imperatives', where this means that they are importantly analogous to the orders of sergeant-majors, prime ministers or company presidents. It is difficult to feel any sort of direct moral reproach if one does not personally use ought words in this way;

and yet one feels that the analysis does in some way represent a moral point of view on the part of its author. He may be disagreeing with you as to whether, when you say he ought to do something, and he says he ought not to do it, there exists 'real disagreement' (and this would have extensive practical implications), or he may be a tolerance maniac, who thinks that if moral judgments are painted in a distasteful manner then people will become much more hesitant about making them. Of course these are the merest conjectures, and it might be said that no ulterior motive existed, - that 'ought words' had simply been taken and analysed, and that was the result. Do it yourself and you will find that whatever your moral feelings, if you do the job squarely and properly, you will get the same result. If there were a 'square and proper' procedure for analysing words, then of course this would settle the matter. But what does an analysis consist of? For my part I see three and only three ways of interpreting the 'are' in propositions like "ought words 'are' imperatives": (i) morally - 'they are so for the truly moral person', (ii) logically - 'This is the only understanding on which they make sense', and (iii) empirically - 'this is the way people do behave' (i.e. like sergeant-majors, or whatever else the word 'imperative' is meant to convey). The first alternative directly establishes my case; and while the second and third do not carry any

direct moral implication, they do invite one to add 'and this is morally abhorrent, therefore...', or 'and since this is quite acceptable (and we hadn't realized it before), we are morally the wiser'. I presume that no philosopher would like to admit that he conceived it a serious scholarly undertaking to record observations about people like 'they behave like sergeant-majors', and I also assume that it would require more than the usual amount of analysis to establish conclusions on either of the former two kinds of terms. I therefore think that neither is 'analysis' the clear-cut, 'objective' procedure which would provide the material for a knock-down reply to such suspicions as I have been voicing, nor is it inappropriate to ask such questions as I have been asking, of a man who, after all, calls his theory 'moral philosophy'. One can see clear possibilities of moral implications in what he says, and if it is not for the sake of these that he says it, then why does he say it?

I will now give an example of an ethical investigation presupposing a moral point of view. When we ask a question like 'How do we learn to be moral?', we might suppose that we were instigating a purely disinterested psychological investigation, for which a man from Mars would be as well equipped as anyone, as long as he was reasonably versed in the techniques of empirical psychology.

But now suppose that the answer turns out to be that we learn through being told things by our elders and betters, through being hedged about with an elaborate system of rewards and punishments, praise and blame, etc., and through doing good deeds. If this answer were supposed to be the whole story about moral learning, it should be fairly plain that it could (logically) only be true, given that the moral life had certain characteristics, about its possession of which one might quite reasonably disagree. The most obvious of these are: (i) It could not be true if morality did not consist of a body of traditional beliefs not determined in any rational manner. (ii) It takes the business of being virtuous to be a business of following a set of rules. (iii) It assumes that but for the sanctions which are contrived concerning it, one would never have any motive for being good, - that virtue is something about which we are naturally reluctant, and that our prime motivation is the pursuit of our own pleasure. And (iv) it implies that if we are ever in doubt about what is the right thing to do, the sole and sufficient way to resolve this doubt is to enquire what is generally believed about the matter. In short, virtue is conceived to be the tedious nuisance most of us found it to be in our youth, when our poor parents had such a struggle to keep us from squabbling, fighting and destroying the furniture.

Of course it may be that sort of thing. But it is not something which is to be assumed without question. And if we began with a different concept of it, - if we conceived it to be a form of intelligent activity, to which one could apply oneself with enthusiasm, curiosity and delight, as one can to mathematics or chemistry, then we could scarcely offer this kind of analysis of the process of learning it. I presume that no one would suggest that a conscientious method of teaching the Pythagorean theorem would be to offer students rewards for believing it (although it might be reasonable enough at first to offer children candy for attending classes in mathematics). For my part, I find it hard to believe that the perpetual popularity of this dull-witted theory of learning is due either to a serious contemplation of the facts or to the moral blindness of those who subscribe to it. Could it be that it is propounded, not as a disinterested psychological conclusion, but as a kind of shock treatment for people who are perhaps all too inclined to regard their principles as absolute, - or as a way of forcing people to realize what it is too casuistical to say explicitly, that an active concern over morals can be a form of intelligent activity?

These comments on particular theories are, however, ad hoc, and no amount of them would ever establish the

universal conclusion that ethics must be practical. With sufficient labour it could conceivably be shown that there has never been an instance of ethical theory which is not in some sense 'practical', but it is not necessary to venture an opinion as to what a thorough examination of the history of ethics would reveal in this regard, because no accumulation of evidence would provide more than an Outsider's Argument to the effect that these philosophers were not mistaken in their conception of moral philosophy.

But I think we might lay down some criteria by which one could answer the question, Can ethics be non-practical? It can be if (i) it makes no direct claim either on the behaviour, or on the thinking, attitudes or moods immediately connected with such behaviour, of the moral agent; (ii) if it does not presuppose anything which would play the role described in '(i)', and about which there could possibly be any difference of opinion; but (iii) is nevertheless of such a nature that there are some grounds for calling it an ethical, rather than a sociological, historical, psychological, or any other kind of investigation. I cannot think of any way of satisfying the third condition which does not at the same time over-ride one of the first two, and to that extent I think that ethics must be 'practical'. But since I take it that we are, with some qualifications, at any event at liberty to be

practical, it does not appear to matter greatly whether we must be, or not.

Chapter Four.

Having argued in the previous chapter that moral philosophy is entitled to say things of practical importance so long as it presents them rationally or argumentatively, I shall now assume that some form of practical enlightenment is what we are looking for, and ask what method of investigation it is appropriate to follow.

I should first attempt to make clearer than I have so far done, the distinction between a method of investigation and a procedure of justification, upon which I have already remarked in Chapter Two. When a practiced theorist stands at a point in his investigations which lies between having a problem and knowing the solution to it, he is not completely at a loss. He is not faced with a choice between either merely waiting until a solution occurs to him, or merely doing things, keeping busy, in the hope that something he does may yield the desired solution. But on the other hand, he does not ordinarily have available to him any procedure which he can be confident will solve his problem, - any recipe for making knowledge. What he is able to do is make enlightened guesses, with the emphasis falling equally on both words. His guesses are enlightened, - they can be classed as

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intelligent behaviour; - but they are also guesses. There is no guarantee that they will produce valuable results. Since they are intelligent behaviour, it would not be inappropriate to attempt to systematize them into something which could be called a science. An example of such an attempt, one might say, would be Mill's 'canons of induction'. If you want to find the cause of a given kind of epidemic, it is an intelligent procedure to compare the conditions prevailing where such epidemics occur with those prevailing where none occurs, and it may be that the cause will be found to lie in the differences so discovered. Finding the differences is not the same thing as finding the cause, - it only provides you with something definite to work on, where otherwise you would be confronted with bafflement.

Rules of investigation can only be formulated with reference to suppositions about what it would be like to have the answer. In this case, we suppose nature to be such that precisely the same conditions will yield precisely the same results. This is what makes it intelligent to search for a cause by analysing for differences. What makes it only an intelligent and not a guaranteed procedure is that we also assume that in nature conditions are not repeated with sufficient precision for our purposes, and that not all the conditions prevailing at a

given time have anything important to do with a particular result. When we have made an enlightened guess, therefore, as to what is the cause of a given state of affairs, we must go about trying artificially to produce the precision which nature does not afford, by means of what we call 'controlled experiments'. These are designed (a) to make a sequence of events precisely repeatable, and (b) to eliminate non-operative factors by varying the conditions until we find the minimum antecedents which will produce the result in question. When we have reached this stage, and carefully checked all our reasoning and observations, we feel entitled to say we have discovered the cause. One might therefore try to say that investigational procedures could be turned into recipes by making them sufficiently precise and complete, adding sufficient qualifications, etc. The reason this will not do is partly that there is no way of ascertaining when we have noticed all the samenesses or differences between two states of affairs, partly that nature is perverse. If we address sufficiently exact questions to her, she will always answer them, but she will not always provide the answer we seek.

If we ask, how do we know that the same conditions invariably produce the same results? - the answer seems to be (a) that we do not know it in advance of our invest-

igations, and (b) that it is not something which is substantiated by our investigations. We think that the same conditions will produce the same results, not because we know nature to be like that, but because it expresses the condition under which alone we can hope to have a science. It is the nature of a science to consist of universals, and in the context of successions of events, the only universal element which can be expected is that of invariable succession. Finding these in nature is a bit like 'finding' a piece of sculpture in a piece of stone - we go at nature with hammer and chisel until we find what we are looking for. In a sense it was there all along, but so were multitudes of other shapes. When we find an invariable succession, it is either untrue or meaningless to say 'Nature is like that'. It is untrue if it means that this garden where I sit with the sun splashing on the roses and the wind tittering the trees displays any direct evidence of it; and it is tautologous if it means that when you conduct such and such an exactly controlled experiment, you will find that such and such results ensue, no matter how often the experiment is repeated.

If it is true that it is the idea of a science which is the ultimate determinant of what constitutes knowledge in that science, then by analogy we could expect that the

idea of a moral science which we have been outlining will determine, not only what sort of thing will qualify as a result, but what method of investigation will be suited to the pursuit of such a result. If we regarded the distinctions drawn in the first two chapters as a sketch of the conditions under which we could affirm a true universal, then we could say that it was this for which we were seeking. In order to exploit this suggestion, I would like first to confess the Kantian inspiration of what I have so far said, and then to discuss Kant's further line of reasoning.

What I have said about scientific reasoning may without too great violence be taken to represent Kant's train of thought in the Critique of Pure Reason. Turning thence to morals, his next step was to say something like this: "Since any science is in search of its appropriate true universal, and morality has to do with actions governed by maxims, it is plain that if we make the maxim of our action such that it could be a universal law of behaviour, this must be the special nature of the moral universal".

If we refer back at this point to the corresponding reasoning about causes, we find that the universal, when taken together (or as Kant says, "schematized") with the idea of temporal succession, gives us the idea that a

causal state of affairs is one where a given succession of events occurs universally; and this information tells us, not what is the cause of what, but how to look for, how to identify an instance of a causal relation.* We might therefore have expected to find a similar state of affairs prevailing in ethics; - instead, Kant's argument appears to say that we can decide completely a priori what maxim to adopt in any particular connection, such as telling lies, keeping promises, etc. Or if this is not Kant's understanding of it, his universal law principle at least does not provide us with any rule for the inclusion of any empirical elements in our reckoning.

One might at this stage be led to seek for such a rule in some form of abstract reasoning, - casting about amongst moral factors for some place to locate a universal element. This might prove successful, but it is unlikely to do so. There are all manner of moral factors, and there are many ways in which, with varying degrees of plausibility, we might relate them according to a

* See Critique of Pure Reason, A 180, B 222: "(In philosophy analogy is such that) from three given members we can obtain a priori knowledge only of the relation to a fourth, not of the fourth member itself. The relation yields, however, a rule for seeking the fourth member in experience, and a mark whereby it can be detected." (Kemp Smith translation.)

rule. There is no foreseeable point at which we could be satisfied, in the abstract, that what was posited was a proper and sufficient rule.

How then may we proceed? - Again the best clue may be found by reverting to the causal analysis. What happened there was that we meditated upon the thinking which actually goes on in scientific investigations, and so discovered the universal element it contained. For us philosophers, such an investigation is not significantly a priori, at least not more so than it is for the man whose thought we are contemplating. We might therefore hope to profit from pursuing the same method in ethics, - contemplating the thinking which actually goes on in the moral life, with a view to discovering what universal elements it contains, - or perhaps one should say, what characteristics it adopts merely on account of their universality.

From the scientific analogy we may extract a further point. The account above given of reasoning about causes since it was intended only to display a pattern of analysis, was brief and sketchy, and represented only one strain amongst many of scientific reasoning about causes, and nothing of any other form of reasoning which may form part of the total complex of scientific thought. Because

of the fragmentary nature of what was there said, it would not pass as 'the philosophy of science', but only as a very small part of it. Similarly we should not expect the work of ethical theory to be done at one stroke, but rather, that it should be a laborious business of sorting out different strains of moral thinking, investigating their relations or want of relation to one another, displaying such incidentals as the invitations to error which their logic provides, etc.

It is important to note that when we are engaged in philosophic meditation about science, we would never think of trying to weld into one theory, widely differing scientific meditations on the same subject matter, such as Ptolemaic and Newtonian astronomy, but would always take as an object of study a view which either was propounded by one man, or could logically be held as one theory. Nothing but confusion could result from trying to think at the same time about two characteristically different scientific phenomena. We would be well advised to follow the same advice in ethics. I shall presently discuss the reasons for our systematic avoidance of this wisdom in the past.

Finally I should like to point out that there appears no reason why the philosophy of science should not be casuistical, at least with respect to the logical form

of scientific thinking. It is common for philosophers of science to make some prefatory remarks to the effect that nothing is farther from their thoughts than the intention to instruct scientists how to conduct their business. This is understandable enough if it merely expresses an unwillingness to make any predictions as to what scientists will or must find to be the case, but beyond this I can see no reason for such reticence. None of us has ever displayed much bashfulness about criticising Ptolemaic astronomy or armchair psychology; and if we can with justice criticise dead modes of thought, I cannot think what difference the fact that a mistake is still alive should make. Perhaps this may be put more strongly this way: if we cannot recognize that a bit of thinking is logical or scientific, then we cannot do philosophy of science; if we can identify what is logical, and can do philosophy, we can by the same token identify what fails to be logical; and if we know that a mistake exists, there can be no philosophical reason why we should not say so. From this I would not infer that it was the whole object of the philosophy of science to instruct scientists in their business. The primary object must be simply to understand what is going on. But if the study of the work of good scientists provides a way of instructing bad ones, or in a perhaps unlikely event, reveals shortcomings in the work of even good

scientists, why should we file these away in a drawer marked 'Top Secret'?

The remarks above about the necessity of taking one body of thought as an object of study have some interesting implications. They seem to imply that we must seek out one man, whose moral thinking will be the basis of our investigations. I say one man, because although there may be many like him, there would be no obvious profit in multiplying cases; and if there were others unlike him, then according to the above reasoning we should have to take either him or one of them, not both.*

It will be a fairly important question, which man we elect. Should we institute a search for Aristotle's "practically wise man"? And if so, by what criteria will he be chosen? To use moral criteria would be question-begging; and to say 'we will take him to be wise if he is regarded as wise', would be to use an Outsider's Argument in a subject setting itself up as an insider's investigation. There is a third alternative: choose the man upon whom your methods of investigation work. On the

* Note that one of Aristotle's reasons for saying that ethics must be a sloppy business was that "there is much difference of opinion" about morals. (See the passage quoted on p.55, footnote.) He could not have a genuine science because he chose to meditate on a multitude of different moral systems at the same time.

face of it, this sounds odd, - it bears startling resemblances to the well-known fallacy of representing in substantiation of an empirical theory those instances which do support it, and ignoring those which do not. But the resemblance is only superficial: there is no prospect of justifying a philosophical theory by saying it is based on the thinking of a good man, or of good men. The question whether or not our theory is any good will be decided according to whether or not we have found a true universal. This is the principle on which our method is based. We are either confident of the principle, or we are not. If we are, then we are quite entitled to adopt this bit of procedure; and if we are not, then we can only go out of business until we find some other principle on which to operate. But when we do this, we will again be in the same position: we can either choose that body of thinking upon which our method works, or we can choose another method.

But we are not yet out of the woods. It now appears open to us to go about applying our method of investigation until we find some person upon whom it works. But there are two difficulties in this project. The first lies in the inaccessibility of the information. In conducting a philosophical study of empirical science we do not encounter this difficulty, because here people write treat-

ises, text books and learned articles in which by and large their thoughts can be taken to be expressed carefully, clearly and thoroughly. Ordinary moral discourse, however, not being conducted under the same critical pressure, and making such extensive claims on the individual that it is less likely to be done with philosophical calm, care and precision, is inclined to be a very low-quality product, even if the deliberations which it expresses happen to be of a high standard. We therefore have to search, not only for the 'practically wise man', but for one with a fine talent for expressing his wisdom.

The second difficulty is that even if we find such a rare specimen, what he tells us will mean nothing unless we can re-think his thoughts in such a way as to become conscious of their logic or rationality. This, after all, is what we are seeking; and yet it is not a distinct characteristic of any bit of discourse, any more than necessary connexion is an observable feature of a causal sequence of events. (Which part of a syllogism is its validity?)

Putting these two reflections together, and considering that whereas only some men are practising scientists, all men, including ourselves, are in some sense practising moralists, I think it becomes fairly plain that the sensible way to have it is that the moral thinking which philosophers should investigate is their own moral thinking.

This way, difficulties of communication are largely overcome: when we report to ourselves about ourselves, there need not be serious doubt about the accuracy, extent or relevance of the information received; we can ask ourselves questions simply and quickly without the elaborate explanations of what it is we want to know which are required if we ask the same question of another person; there need not be any problem arising from modesty or reticence; and most of all, where other people are available for an interview here and there, we have ourselves around fairly constantly, we can become familiar with ourselves to a high degree, and we needn't worry about wasting precious time if we linger over questions which may be of the greatest significance, but which may on the face of it appear quaint, frivolous or perverse.

On the other hand, if we invite the practically wise man to tell us how he conceives this business of morality, he may ramble on, telling us about his favorite grievances, or about the moral trials he has faced in the past, or his early family life. If we succeed in persuading him to tell us the sort of things we are anxious to learn, he may yet mislead us through being unclear, incomplete or unsystematic. We could conceivably right such shortcomings through sufficiently well-aimed questioning, but the only condition under which we could do this would be if our questions were

prompted by our own notion of morality; and if we possessed this qualification, we might as well leave other practically wise men unmolested.

I said earlier that we had in the past systematically avoided the choice of one person's thought as an object of philosophical investigation. I think this is partly because a great deal of philosophical activity concerning morals begins with distress over the prevalence of moral disagreement, and is directed towards finding a way of reconciling these multitudinous conflicts. This, when one thinks of it, is a staggeringly ambitious scheme, and one in which success is most improbable, because what can one do but add yet another disagreeing voice to the general clamour? But even if we should accept this as the task of philosophy, it would not follow that we should linger over the varying views longer than was necessary to discover the dimensions of our problem. It would still be reasonable to expect that the Great Reconciling Light, whatever more imposing characteristics it possessed, would at least be one well-integrated system, such as you might expect one man's thought to be, but could scarcely expect that of two or more people to be.

But the more important reason lies in what I have been maintaining, - that if I am to study one person's moral thinking, the obvious candidate is myself. One may

(and I do) suspect that in the history of ethics, the experience of any given philosopher has in fact provided the ultimate source of ideas; but philosophers have at any rate professed to embrace every possible alternative, from canvassing the views widely held, eliminating excess and ambiguity and ironing out inconsistencies, (Aristotle and W.D. Ross*), to moral psychology (Butler and Hume), and studying history (Marx) and evolution (Spencer). It would not be inappropriate at this point to consider and criticise some of these alternative methods, particularly since none of them is yet dead. But to do it thoroughly would be a very lengthy task; and in any case, since the day when we were informed of the "naturalistic fallacy", the problem has not been so much that they are not dead, as that they will not lie down. But assuming, as I think I may, that all such methods have a drastic implausibility

* See Foundations of Ethics, (Oxford), pp. 1 and 3: "I take as my starting-point the existence of a large body of beliefs and convictions to the effect that there are certain kinds of acts that ought to be done, and certain kinds of things that ought to be brought into existence. Our object must be to compare them with each other, and to study them in themselves, with a view to seeing which best survive such examination, and which must be rejected." "Our attempt must be to make these thoughts little by little more definite and distinct, and by comparing one opinion with another to discover at what point each opinion must be purged of excess and mis-statement till it becomes harmonious with other opinions which have been purified in the same way." "This is the time-honoured method of ethics. It was the method of Socrates and Plato. ... It was the method of Aristotle. ... Kant's method was the same."

about them, and assuming, (what may not be altogether true), that they are all undertaken as ways of avoiding the study of our own moral experience, I would like to ask, what is it that has so driven us away from the method I am advocating?

In the last chapter I mentioned some considerations of personal embarrassment, which might equally be operative here. I may feel that I cannot surely presume to have knowledge of so holy a thing as virtue; or that it is graceless of me to say that I do, when this implies that I am superior to other mortals. There are no doubt cases in which these points are very well taken; but they surely have no general validity. If it is reasonable to think that anybody knows about virtue, it is reasonable to think that I may do so, and indeed it is absurd to pretend that I do not if, as a philosopher I am engaged in telling people about it; and to say that I do know about virtue carries no implication as to what other people know. It would be pointless, perhaps to do philosophy in any casuistical manner if you thought that everybody was as well-instructed morally as yourself; but that some people could profit from such instruction is what no one denies. Need I argue this point further? Do let us assume that all such misgivings are unnecessary.

A rather different sort of reason derives from the well-known proneness of human kind to err. I think a little differently today about some moral issues from what I thought yesterday, and considerably differently about most all moral issues from what I thought ten years ago. It is therefore not unreasonable to expect that ten years hence I shall again have changed my views considerably; and if this is so, what can be said for a philosophical argument which relies on today's thinking? This difficulty would not provide a reason for turning for safety to the views of other people, which can be assumed to be similarly infected; but it might at least provide a reason for turning away from one's own views.

To say in reply to this that it is simply the nature of a scrupulous morality to be in continual change, and that philosophy cannot be expected to provide final answers, is to say something from which I would not wish to dissent; and yet it would relieve the difficulty only if there were some specifiable common principles governing the changes, for otherwise philosophy would have nothing to say except that "change is everywhere". It should be noted, however, that to agree that perpetual change is in the nature of morality is to cancel any tendency this difficulty has to make us look anywhere else for the sake of finality. You might say that when we change our minds, we do it accord-

ing to some principles; and this of course is often true. But often we change our minds without any clear awareness of any principle, and sometimes we make ultimate decisions (or we find on thinking about it afterwards that we have done so), in respect of which we cannot even imagine upon what principle they might have been made. I therefore think that if it were assumed that in philosophy we were looking for a principle or principles having direct prescriptive force, like the "Greatest Happiness Principle", or the rules of thumb we exchange in ordinary discourse, this argument would prove (a) that we could not look to our own experience for it, but (b) that we could not look elsewhere for it, either.

But it is not necessary to assume this. If there are any changes we make on purely logical grounds, these are not deduced from, or subsumed under any prescriptive principle, but are, so to speak immediately recognized as proper or valid. We might conceivably formulate prescriptive logical rules, like 'If you have said "All men are mortal", then you must affirm mortality of everything of which it can be said, "This is a man"'. But this would be an absurd thing to do, for at least two reasons: (1) we would need further rules for subsuming any given bit of business under the rules, and further rules for subsumption under the rules of subsumption, ad infinitum, and (11),

either the rules would be themselves derived from an intuitive grasp or immediate recognition of their propriety - the propriety of doing the things they recommended, - or they would be merely arbitrary, and logic would be deprived of its peculiar force or necessity.* But I shall have more to say of this in Chapter Five.

Finally, I think we have always (quite rightly) felt that we cannot use arguments of the form, 'This is true because I think so', or 'because I am convinced of it', or 'feel it very strongly', or 'because I have so experienced it'. In short, we cannot ground philosophical arguments on our own experience, emotions or feelings. But to use this argument for the present purpose betrays a lack of awareness of the distinction between a method of investigation and a method of justification. I have proposed that our method of investigation should consist in a study of our own moral experience; but the form of justification I have proposed is that any conclusions we

* Is there any sense in the widespread contemporary talk about 'the rules governing the use of concepts'? We might be better able to make up our minds about this if these rules were specified sometimes, rather than merely referred to. For my part, I have neither enjoyed any instruction in such rules, nor have I figured out for myself what they are, or set up my own rules in any other way. And when I use words, I am not conscious of my obedience to any rules, - although my feelings of responsibility vary from use to use, and one of the ways of explaining this would be to say that my feeling of responsibility varied as the degree to which my usage conformed to 'the rules'.

reach should be acceptable if they are recognizable as a true universal. Since there is no suggestion that we should use moral experience as the ground of an argument, the point, although in some contexts well taken, can here have no relevance.

It is interesting to ask, however, whether there could ever be a general rule against the use of personal experience as an object of investigation. I think it should be plain enough that if we have any method of proving any conclusions we reach, it should be entirely irrelevant, by what means we have acquired them, (and to this extent the prevalence of the rule in question may be symptomatic of a deep irrationality in moral philosophy. If we entertain no definite prospect of justifying our conclusions, then the type of argument mentioned in the last paragraph is all that we are left with, and the rule becomes quite plausible.) But there are certainly occasions upon which it would be very poor advice to suggest an examination of personal experience: if we wanted to discover the specific gravity of lead, for example. But in these cases it is not the intrinsic peril of personal experience which warns us against it, - it is just that this is not what our statements purport to be about.

There is another aspect of the matter which requires

to be mentioned. If I am right in contending that moral philosophy is a specific kind of analysis of the moral experience of the theorist, it would appear to follow that the calibre of the resulting theory will vary according to the moral calibre of its author. One might object to this either on the ground that it would prevent a lot of people from being moral philosophers, or that it would result in the appearance of queer specimens of philosophising, based on quaint, cranky or queer moral outlooks. I would certainly agree that the method has this tendency, but I do not think that this constitutes a genuine ground of objection. Whatever method is advocated, there will always be good and bad practitioners of it, and there will also always be those who refuse to adopt it. There just is a profusion of queer specimens of philosophising, and of aspiring philosophers who would be much better advised to do something else. Of course, if we were, by this method, bound to accept as good philosophy anything which was in fact based on the experience of its author, then the objection would be a strong one. But we have also set up a criterion of good philosophy, which makes no specific reference to the method of investigation. Once we have decided that a specimen is bad philosophy, we are invited to explain this either by the quaint moral outlook of its author, or by whether or not he has followed the suggested method. But we could never use any of these references as

the criterion. In case any philosopher is made anxious by the thought that he may not be a sufficiently good man to perform his function, he may find some reassurance in the reflection that, as I began by saying, remarks about procedure only count as intelligent advice. It is logically possible that one might secure the necessary information by some such procedure as cross-examining the practically wise man. The argument against doing so only demonstrates the unlikelihood of it.

My argument in this chapter has taken a form which may fail to carry conviction for either of two reasons, - one may have doubts either about the claim that knowledge always consists in the discovery of a true universal, or about the extensively used analogy between scientific thinking and moral thinking. And since the former claim itself rests on the latter analogy (or at least employs it), I will add here a discussion of this kind of procedure. There is an age-old difficulty in philosophical discussions of knowledge: we cannot say (or at least we cannot say as a synthetic proposition), that 'since all knowledge is characterized by X, therefore possessing X will be the mark of knowledge in field M', because either the premiss is a generalization from all fields of knowledge including M, in which case the argument is analytic, or the premiss is an incomplete generalization, in which

case we do not have an argument. I can see two ways of avoiding the difficulty, but I am not sure that either of them is entirely satisfactory.

The first points out the absurdity of the alternative: suppose one were to say 'In all fields except M, knowledge is characterized by X, but in M it is characterized by Y'. One could then be required most urgently to explain why one called both phenomena 'knowledge'. One might reply to this that they were each called knowledge by their authors or proponents. But this would not solve the difficulty, because on the one hand it would leave unanswered both the question, why do they call the respective phenomena 'knowledge', and the question whether those who called what was characterized by X 'knowledge' were using the word 'knowledge' in the same sense as it was used by those who called what was characterized by Y, 'knowledge'; and on the other hand it would not explain why you, the epistemologist, have adopted the same usage. After all one does not have to talk in any particular way, and when one purports to be a philosopher one can at a minimum be expected to use words responsibly; and this means having some better reason for adopting a terminology, than that it happens to be used (perhaps carelessly) by other people. One can at least be expected to understand and agree with their reasons.

But if it is true that a variety of phenomena must share at least one significant characteristic before it makes sense to call them all by the same name, we still are not entitled to turn this around in such a way that from the observation that modes of knowledge A to L possess characteristic X, we can infer that M will possess the same characteristic, because while we know that everything which can responsibly be called knowledge will share at least one characteristic, we do not know that this one property will be 'X', even although, on our supposition, all but one do possess X. It might still be that M did not possess X, but did possess a characteristic which the others also shared, although we had not previously noticed that they shared it.

This might appear an over-scrupulous doubt, were we not confronted with so many examples of how epistemology had gone wrong through the failure to entertain it. Hume's generalization that every true "idea" had its corresponding "impression" is not a bad one, though he himself demonstrated its limitations. The view that every true idea is practically useful is also a fair enough remark, and more liberal than most of its breed, but the absurdity of employing it as a criterion of knowledge anywhere must have been obvious from the start. Likewise to say that every instance of knowledge is either "a priori" or

empirical is a generalization covering many instances, but, as its author showed, by no means all.*

But all this does not show that there is no prospect whatever of arguing from all but one, to the remaining form of knowledge. We have assumed that all genuine forms will have something in common; and we may assume that this characteristic, though it may be difficult to unearth, is not undiscoverable. Thus it is conceivable that in the absence of one form, we should find the characteristic which all, including it, possess. This is the first point.

The second is that all known generalizations about knowledge have shortcomings, even as applied to the recognized forms, - they will not account for mathematics, or history, or psychology, or "common sense", - or if they do, they do so only by means of devices and expedients which have nothing to recommend them beyond making the generalization plausible. Amidst all the differences between the various recognized forms of knowledge, it would be surprising if there were many significant and genuinely different characteristics which they shared; and thus if we could make a generalization which genuinely and without artifacts could be affirmed of all recognized forms of knowledge, there would be a very strong likelihood

*See also the remarks on pp. 55-56, above.

that this would apply also to the final member. But only a strong likelihood. This is the second point.

as/ The third is that it is not as if, when we were talking about knowledge, we were discussing something independent and sacrosanct, like facts are supposed to be, - something that we tamper with at our peril. Knowledge is not something which is there, but something we make; and with some ponderous qualifications, such as that about tampering with facts (and even this, the facts themselves do not demand), - we can make it as we please. There is consequently not quite the same terror about the procedure as there would be about, say, arguing from the psychological characteristics of Englishmen to those of Chinamen, if we had no independent knowledge of the latter. There would be more analogy to arguing from the shared characteristics of what has always been regarded as good architecture, to whether a new style of building is well or poorly designed architecturally. In neither case is the analogy exact, but the latter at least brings out the point that in thinking this way about knowledge, one is not in peril of being confronted with a stubbornly refractory fact. If we choose to say, for example, that only those things which stand up to such and such tests will we regard as historical knowledge, we are at liberty to make whatever sense we can of this scheme, in a way that

we are not at liberty if we say, having observed Englishmen, that Chinamen are reserved, conservative and beer-loving.

And finally, it is not as if we were entirely without moral knowledge, and were actually attempting to constitute it by means of an argument from other forms of knowledge. Although practices vary widely, there is a lot of moral thinking going on, and this may provide us with some way of verifying the generalization gained from other forms of thinking. Of course it is not easy to say upon what terms moral thinking may be introduced into the deliberations. If I had a cranky moral viewpoint, and it was assumed that moral thinking should be taken equally with history, mathematics, etc., as an inviolable datum for generalization, I could foul the whole proceedings by simply insisting of every criterion of knowledge which was advanced, that it did not account for my moral thinking. And if some genius produced a criterion which took care of all my objections, and did no violence to other forms of thought, he would still have to come to terms with all the other cranky people.

I therefore think it is better that the investigation should begin with a study of the non-moral forms of thought, and that it will be successful if there emerges

something which (a) accounts fairly for the recognized forms of thought, (b) will serve not merely as a comment upon them, but as a criterion of them (i.e. if it is a convertible proposition), and (c) can quite thinkably apply in the moral field - that is to say, is such that it would be in no way quaint, surprising, odd or incredible that a person should actually think morally in the way he would have to think if this were the criterion of genuine thinking of all kinds, including moral thinking.

What then of the people whose moral thinking did not happen to be of that sort? In the first place, I think it is probable that, once given the interpretative clue provided by such an inquiry, it would be seen that much more of moral experience than one might otherwise suppose did in fact display the characteristic in question; and our moral piety would no doubt be greatly relieved if this turned out to be the case. But certainly not all moral thinking would measure up, - and of this I think all one could say is that it doesn't measure up.

In the next chapter I shall explain the results of an inquiry like that above outlined, although I shall merely claim, not demonstrate, that they are true of all genuine forms of thinking. But I have not yet said anything to justify the particular use in this chapter, of

arguments from what prevails in the philosophy of science to what must prevail in the philosophy of morals. The points for which I have employed the analogy are as follows: (i) instead of attempting to reason completely a priori as to what the nature of the moral universal may be, we should investigate moral experience to find what recognizably universal elements it contains; (ii) we should not expect to discover only one principle, - there may be different ones appropriate to different contexts; (iii) instead of investigating at one time diverse bodies of moral thinking, we should study what either is, or could logically be incorporated as, the thought of one man. My subsequent contention that this man might as well be the theorist himself was made without reference to any scientific considerations.

I think I need advance no elaborate arguments to show that these claims are sufficiently reasonable in themselves, and I therefore take it that the only doubtful point is whether knowledge does in fact consist in the discovery of a true universal. The discussion of this question is the task of my next and final chapter.

Chapter Five.

So far I have left the notion of a 'true universal' largely indeterminate; and the contention that it is the business of moral philosophy to discover such gems in experience has been substantiated only by what might be regarded as a doubtful analogy. I would like now to remedy as far as possible these shortcomings.

There is some temptation, when explaining one's use of terms, to try to argue that 'this is what they mean' ('this is what one must mean by them'). In a sense this is unnecessary, or even foolish. There is no need to argue anything. One is entitled to use words in any way that suits one's purpose, so long as it is made sufficiently clear how one is using them; and all that it needed, therefore, is that I should provide such an explanation. And yet it is not as simple as this. I have to use words to explain how I am using words, (unless I can use them with such arresting precision that it can be seen merely from their use how they are meant), - and unless I adopt usages which are very like the common ones, I am making it unnecessarily difficult for anyone who reads what I have to say. I could in principle take an English dictionary and move every word along to the meaning given for the word following; then substitute for

each word given in definition, the word alphabetically preceding it; then use my new language to write philosophy. But this would have an unnecessary tendency to conceal what I was trying to communicate; and I therefore think there is some need to have and to demonstrate a community of usage between yourself and other people.

The word 'universal', at least in its logical uses, is applied to empirical concepts, like 'pipe', 'tobacco', and 'match', and like 'above', 'below', 'around'; to propositions, like 'all men are mortal' or 'we should never tell lies'; to truths, like 'Caesar crossed the Rubicon' or 'the universe is expanding'; and to arguments, like the proofs of mathematical propositions. Words are called universal in some such sense as that they stand indifferently for all instances of whatever they designate (one cannot apply a name to one phenomenon, and without reason decline to call another just like it by the same name); general propositions are universal in the sense that they claim something is true without exception, or that whatever they assert covers all instances within the range of their assertion; truths are universal in the sense that everyone must affirm them, or that anyone who affirms anything different in the same connection must be mistaken; and arguments are universal in the sense that they purport to be binding on all rational minds, or that,

given the premisses one cannot logically affirm any other conclusion.

There is a difference between claiming universality, and possessing it; and in the sense in which I am using 'true universal', anything is an instance which possesses the universality it claims. There are no obvious restrictions to the scope of the claim an idea makes. I can formulate a general proposition about 'dogs', or about 'brown dogs', 'one-eyed brown dogs', or 'one-eyed brown dogs born in the month of May', and they will equally claim universality, which will be satisfied if what I say is true of all instances within the particular scope of my claim. From the mere mention of a general proposition, a truth or an argument, given that we understand the words it employs, we can see the claim it makes, or the pretensions it has; but when we responsibly use or assert any of these, we at least think that the claim is well justified, - that they actually possess what they claim to possess. This distinction does not seem to apply very easily to individual concepts. If we merely utter 'Cat', there is nothing in the utterance itself which tells us what, if any, claim is being made. It might, on occasion, be equivalent to 'This (pointing) is a cat'; but even this could be taken in at least four ways, - as "I propose to call phenomena like what I am now pointing at, 'cats'", or

"It is general for English speaking people to call things like what I am now point at, 'cats'", or "It may surprise you to learn that this curious beast is in fact a cat (i.e. born of feline parents, fond of mice, capable of begetting 'kittens', etc.)", or "There is in nature a species sufficiently extensive and sufficiently unlike other species to make it worthy of a name of its own, and I hereby christen it 'cat' (or it has been so christened by English speaking people)". Although attempts have been made to say that one or other of these is the proper meaning, I think that such a project must be regarded as hopeless, because on the one hand there are contexts in which one could quite reasonably mean any of these by 'This is a cat', and on the other, if we conceive such an argument to be an attempt to show that concepts can make claims, we can see that it succeeds only by the (questionable) conversion of them into propositions, which can make claims.

The situation is the same if we analyse the use of concepts in propositions. If I say 'All cats are slinky', for the word 'cats' I can equally substitute 'beings to which I have given the name "cat"', or 'beings which are by English speaking people called "cats"', and as long as I do not lead you to think that I mean one when I actually mean the other (if there is any difference), I cannot be

criticised for my usage. But if you had asked me whether I would care to make any generalizations about cats, and I replied, 'Well for one thing, all cats are slinky', then you might say I was bound to use the word in only one way. If your request was about 'beings called "cats" by English speaking people', and my reply was about 'beings I have chosen to call "cats" (i.e. tigers)', then you might say it was wrong of me to employ 'cats' the way I did, - I was bound by the context to use it 'the way English speaking people do'. But this is not exact. I was bound only to use it the way it was used in the question, and this might just as well have been an idiosyncratic use, and might have been unlike both the common English usage and my own use. I, who mean tigers by 'cats', can answer your question about cats (i.e. gossip women), by putting 'cats' in inverted commas to signify parenthetically 'as you call them', without obliging myself to discontinue my own peculiar use.

Even granting this, one might now say that in any case we would each have to translate ourselves into standard English usage before we could become mutually clear about the other's personal usage; and no doubt this is what we would ordinarily do. But we need not do so, - we could get straightened away by pointing, or by taking careful note of the other's use until it becomes clear that 'if he is talking sense at all, he must mean tigers (or whatever)'.

No doubt, before we could do this it would be necessary that some of the words we each used should be common; but we are not bound to any one usage of any one word.

But let us return to the distinction with which this digression began, the distinction between claiming universality, and possessing it. If I assert the proposition, 'All typewriters wear out', this may be explicated in at least three ways. It may more fully read 'I have never known a typewriter which did not wear out', 'I have never known an exception to this rule, and I suspect there is something about typewriters which makes them wear out', or 'I know why it is impossible to build an eternal typewriter, (and this receives substantiation from the fact that in the past, typewriters have without exception worn out)'. If on cross-examination I admitted that what I meant was the first of these, I could quite reasonably be asked, 'Well, why didn't you say so?'. The reason for this is that one can know from the mere mention of a proposition of this kind, what claim it makes, and from this one can in this case see that the intention of the user of it is less than what he actually says.

One might wish to ask 'Why didn't you say so?' also in the second case, but it is not so obviously appropriate here, because when I say that my reason for saying that

all typewriters wear out is partly that they have always been known to do so, partly that I suspect there is some reason why they could not be otherwise, I show that I am at least aware of the logical pretensions of 'All typewriters wear out', even if I have not matched them with my reasons for asserting it. In this case my reasons tend directly to this end, where they did not in the former case. In the third reading, we may suppose that the proposition actually possesses the universality that it pretends. And I presume this is something we would all require of any serious or scientific thinking, even if we are not so scrupulous about assertions in ordinary conversation. Much philosophical discussion of knowledge is made unnecessarily difficult by the attempt to insist that the things which are said should apply not only to deliberate attempts to know, but also and equally to ordinary chit-chat about the weather, friends, enemies and domestic animals. One can talk scientifically about these things, but in ordinary conversation we are to a degree just letting our tongues wag, and it is therefore not appropriate to apply the same standards to what we say.

My second point about universals is that they are things which are posited, proposed or undertaken. There is nothing in nature which requires us to think at all, and when we do undertake to think, there is nothing which requires us to

think in any given way. When we make assertions, it is we, not things, who lay down the principles upon which what we observe - things, facts or whatever - may be deemed relevant or not so. When I am confronted by a cat, I may with no epistemological sin ignore it; but if I choose to remark on it, I may think 'How lithe it is!', or 'How soft and warm', or 'It stands eight and a quarter inches high', 'weighs two pounds', 'is fond of sleep', etc. There are masses of things one could say; one does not have to say any, or all of them. And if I content myself with, say, mentioning the beast's weight, some odd soul who thought that things themselves determine what we say about them might retort, 'You say that it weighs two pounds, but surely you can see how soft and warm it is'. Another might reproach me for all the truths about it I had not mentioned; and yet another might say that there is nothing two-pound-ish about the cat. A cat is a cat, and a pound is a purely arbitrary unit of measurement which is no part of the being of cats or anything else. To all such there is much the same reply: 'I undertook of my own free will to mention the cat's weight. In saying that it weighed two pounds, I neither affirmed nor denied that it had other characteristics; and I am not concerned whether there is anything objectively two-pound-ish about it, nor whether there is objectively anything else about it, because I have my criteria of

whether a thing weighs two pounds (or is soft and warm, or anything else), and when I make an assertion my only concern is whether the object of the assertion satisfies the criteria in question'. It is the nature of what one asserts which prescribes the criteria by which one can ascertain whether it is true, but the only sense in which things themselves determine what, out of all the assertions we might make, we do say of them, is that we generally insist that what we say should be true. This is essentially the same point as I made earlier (p. 110) concerning reasoning about causes.

To agree with this it is not necessary to disagree with the venerable theory that universals are "in things". They may quite well be 'there', but as long as they remain there, not shared with, represented in, copied by or taken up into our thinking, they are nothing to us, and we cannot be said to have knowledge. If one thinks that the universals which are 'there' can be identified by some process which is separate from the process of conceiving or thinking a universal, he will say that we possess a true universal when the one which we think is just like the one which is 'there'. But if he thinks there is no distinction to be drawn between 'identifying a universal', and thinking, conceiving or positing one, he may still think that when we have a true universal we suppose it is

'just like' the one which is 'there', or that we are justified in so supposing, even though we cannot immediately 'see' the likeness. If one thinks that this supposition is unnecessary, it becomes very difficult to continue in agreement with the theory that universals are 'in things', but it is not obviously impossible; and the reason the relation between the two sorts of assertion is so liberal is that one belongs to the science of metaphysics and the other belongs to the science of epistemology, and if there are relations between these two sciences, they are not such that a proposition in one can directly contradict a proposition in the other.

But however one sees it, it is difficult to deny that it takes a bit of doing to come into possession of a universal. This applies as much as anything to the elementary case of the use of empirical concepts. When one asserts 'This is a cat', one may mean any of the four things mentioned on p. 138-9. If the meaning is 'I propose to call things like this 'cats'', it is obvious enough that an undertaking is being made; but if it is 'Things like this are called "cats" by English speaking people', one may be either at the same time proposing to call them something else in spite of this, or proposing the same usage for oneself because of this. The third (or informative) meaning is not relevant for the present purpose,

and the fourth is too obviously an undertaking to require further comment.

It does not appear to make any difference, for what reasons one says things. If I say 'Two plus two equals four', I may do so because everybody I have asked has professed to think this is the case, or because when I say anything different, people seem to disapprove, or because I think the proposition self-evident, or because I think it best to adopt the same notation as other people. But whatever my reason, I am making this so for me, committing myself to it with whatever it may entail. It is something I do not need to do, - I could ignore the whole business, or adopt an opposing view. But I do it.

My next point is that the thinking or positing of things as universal makes certain demands on us, almost as if there were another will requiring our submission. This contention partly depends on the last, because if thinking a universal were not something we willed or did, but was, say, something we could not fail to do, there would be no place for "demands" upon us, to which we could accede, or against which we could rebel.

It is not very clear, in the case of individual concepts, how this government or control occurs, because as I pointed out, they make no explicit claims, and the

'control' must derive from the intention with which they are used. If I say (to vary the example) 'This is a lemon', I need not say it under the aspect of universality, - it may be just 'I call this a lemon now, but this is not what I have done, or what I shall do another time, unless it so pleases me. And I shall not call other things like it lemons either, unless it pleases me'. There is no sense in which I cannot fail to do other than this, - I am free to behave as it suits me in this as in other regards. (But it is not quite the same if I say 'These are lemons'. They may, of course, be a completely miscellaneous assortment of objects. But if there are important similarities between them, and you produce another thing just like 'these' and invite me to call it a lemon, I might for some special reason decline, but I now appear at least to be under an obligation to provide such a reason. Still I might dissent from this obligation by saying that the significant similarity between the things was just chance, and I did not call them by the same name because of the similarity. I just happened for a moment to feel like saying 'These are lemons' of a group of things which, as far as I was concerned, were completely miscellaneous. And to say something like this would be logically different from, say, declining to call a further object a lemon, on the ground that it was larger than the rest, because in this case I would be admitting that, had it not been

larger, I should have been obliged to give it the same name as the rest. In this case I recognize a conditional obligation, while in the former case I eschewed all obligation.)

But to return to the singular usage, ordinarily when a person gives a name to a thing, we expect him to continue to call the same thing by the same name (unless there is some special reason to make a change - it does not long remain appropriate to call a given animal a kitten), - and to use the same word for other things sufficiently similar to it. And this expectation is neither just an old custom, nor is it based on any explicit representation that is made about the use of the word, but on the assumption that the person is in fact intending to posit or re-affirm a universal. Our expectation is that the individual should be consistent with his own intentions, whatever they may be. Since we can not always enquire about a person's intentions, we generally assume that they are the normal ones. But if any criticisms based on this assumption are met with an explanation that the intentions of the person criticised were in fact different from the normal ones, then unless we subscribe to some sophisticated philosophical doctrine, we regard this as a satisfactory reply. And it is striking that we will then insist that a person be consistent with his chosen usage, even

though we ourselves think it perverse or frivolous. But we can only insist that a person be consistent with intentions which he does have. We can perhaps demand that he have some intention, but we cannot require that he should have any specific one.

At this point it might be objected that ordinarily in using words people do not have any conscious opinion as to the logical specifications of their use, - they simply chatter in whatever way they have learned from parents and teachers, - and that therefore this talk about having intentions is something which could only apply to a few rare birds, like philosophers. To some extent I think this is true. It is only people like philosophers and scientists, engaged in serious intellectual pursuits, who stop to choose words, adopt usages, and in general be deliberate about what they say, and how they say it. But even if most people could not begin to answer a question about their intentions in using a word, they could still be pressed into making some such desperate remark as 'Well I suppose I just intended to use it in the normal way. I suppose that is what I always intend'. And while such a remark could not be regarded as a description of a conscious purpose, it could be regarded as true in the sense that it describes that person's linguistic habits, and this is sufficient for our purposes.

The governing function of universals is clearer in cases where some claim is made, - in universal propositions, truths and arguments. If I say 'All cats are slinky', I am thereby bound to affirm of everything which I must agree to be a cat, that it is slinky. (Here can be seen the effect of the foregoing remarks. I need not mean any specific thing by 'cat', but I must mean something determinate, something by reference to which it can be decided whether this, that or the next thing is (what I call) a cat. And the same can be said about 'slinky'. If I mean nothing determinate by the concepts which my propositions contain, the claims which such propositions attempt to make are vacuous.) But suppose I have said this about cats, and you are presenting me with a succession of beasts, inviting me to affirm of each that it is slinky. Now suppose that we come upon a sweet lovable creature, tenderness and generosity glowing in its eyes and discernible in its every action; and we will suppose that in other respects it is quite like all the other animals in the parade - not the same colour, perhaps, or quite the same size, but having sharp claws, smooth fur, delicate movements, fond of cleaning itself, etc. You feel logically entitled to insist that I affirm of it as of all the others, that it is slinky. And yet it appears not to be so.

At this point there are several alternatives available to me. I may throw caution to the winds and assert that this gentle beast is slinky like the rest; or I may agree that it is not slinky, but claim that on the other hand it is not a cat. These are both ways of sustaining my original assertion about cats. On the first alternative, when the discrepancy between what appears to be the case and what I claim is the case is pressed upon me, I may say either that it is slinky in some recondite sense, - that it has a veneer of generosity hiding its natural slinkiness, that we just happen to have caught it in one of its better moods, etc.; or I may say 'If you think this cat an exception, this only shows that you have not understood what I mean by slinky', and thence proceed to show that I mean something by it which (a) it is not too surprising that I should mean (as it would be if I meant 'fond of cleaning themselves'), and (b) can be affirmed, not only of this, but of all the other exhibits. (Perhaps the former condition is not entirely necessary.) The first answers again were ways of sustaining my original (apparent) use of 'slinky', while the other is an amendment of it. On the other hand if I claim that it is not a cat, and am then pressed with the similarity of it to the other exhibits, I may either say it can't be a cat (because all cats are slinky), or I may point out some characteristic it has or has not, over and above the absence of slinkiness,

which distinguishes it from the other exhibits in a way that they do not distinguish themselves from one another by the several differences they possess.

But I need not sustain my original assertion - I may in some way back down at this point. And what I do here may either amount to quitting the field ('All right, I was wrong about cats'), or positing some new universal, like 'All cats are slinky except those born under a new moon'. And from this again some new logical inquisition may ensue. But the point about all this is that having made a universal affirmation, I am logically driven into this complex dilemma. I am not logically driven to any particular resolution of it. Any of the above ways of handling the problem (except "it can't be a cat") might conceivably turn out satisfactorily enough. But I am logically driven to do something. If I make no affirmation, you can parade all the cats in Christendom before me, and there will be no logical claim on my behaviour; and if I make a less than universal statement ('Some cats are slinky'), the only thing which can put me through my paces is a universal counter-statement ('No cats are slinky').

Another point which may need to be mentioned is that it does not require an external agent to put us through

such trials as these, nor a parade of actual cats. Our thoughts move themselves in this fashion, and up to a point they manage very well with recollected and even supposed cats. Indeed, it is the thought of supposed cats which makes us hesitate to pronounce universal propositions, even when they tally with all known instances.

I shall now attempt to illustrate the way in which the idea that something is true makes claims upon our intellectual behaviour. One might expect that this would be the same as the last, because it was the claim that (it is true that) all cats are slinky which made for all the difficulty. If I had merely 'mentioned' it - thought it without attempting to regard it as true, then I should have had no occasion to be upset by the appearance of that lone non-slinky animal. Perhaps the difference lies in the distinction between claiming that something is true, and regarding it as true, or deciding that it is true; or perhaps it is in the distinction between cases where we can decide something entirely on its merits, and cases where we must rely on probabilities. In any case, you will see from what follows that there is a marked difference.

If I say 'Hannibal crossed the Alps', and you say 'Jones thinks he went by sea', you are questioning my opinion that he went by land. I cannot say 'Jones must

be wrong, because he went by land', because this assumes precisely what is in question. Nor can I, unless I can unmistakably prove that Hannibal went by land, satisfy your doubts by offering you my reasons for thinking this. Jones may have just as good reasons for thinking he went by sea. I am therefore bound to provide an independent criticism of Jones's reasoning on the subject, and of the reasoning of anyone else who has a significant competing theory. (This is why in philosophy we very often find the argumentation of a theory partly taking the form of a systematic critique of all opposing views. We are sometimes tempted to think that this is a needless and a graceless gesture; and yet what can an author do, if the affirmation of the truth of his theory implies but does not prove the untruth of a variety of others? Of course if we offer our theories in a more tentative spirit, this may not be necessary; but it is hard to tell when this is merely an excuse for logical laziness.)

This is not the most decisive of rational principles, depending as it does on at least three factors. It depends firstly, as I said, on the degree of assurance with which we wish to affirm something. If I am only suggesting that Hannibal crossed the Alps, - offering it for your consideration, I may take as read, alternative views and their criticism; (and if I recount it as part of an historical

narrative, in which it is only disconcerting to stop and hear arguments all along the way, it may be taken that I have in fact subjected the matter to critical examination, which I do not here reproduce). Secondly, it depends on the kind of support which is available for the kind of contention in question. No one would think of demanding of a mathematical argument that it should enter into a critical discussion of alternative views, because there is not that residue of doubt, when everything has been said which can be said in favor of a given proposition, which supports the 'if' in the proposition, 'If I am right, then you are wrong'. Wherever there is such a residue of doubt, the 'if' remains, and since when I assert that I am right I at the same time assert that you are wrong, and yet your mistakenness does not follow from the grounds upon which I assert that I am right, your mistakenness must be independently established. Thirdly, it depends on the assumption that two differing views on the same subject cannot both be correct. And while this is a very venerable principle in rational discourse of all kinds, it has recently been questioned, particularly in respect of its use in ethical discourse.

Many of the criticisms, it seems to me, amount to nothing more than pointing out how very difficult it is, often, to be sure that we are "really disagreeing" in a

moral argument. If I think it incumbent upon me to look after my aged parents, I may through misadventure get into a moral argument with someone whose parents are quite capable of looking after themselves, and who does not conceive himself to have the same duty; and it may take some time before we realize that there is no disagreement - he quite agrees that I should look after my parents, and I quite agree that he needn't, under the circumstances, look after his. But no multiplication of such instances would have any tendency to show that it is a mistake to think that when we are "really disagreeing", we can not both be right.

Still other criticisms, one suspects, are advanced in the interest of tolerance and forbearance, since if there were no reason to suppose that those who disagreed with me morally were mistaken, I should never have grounds for moral indignation. But this is surely a desperate expedient, since it works not only between people, but within a given person's thought; and if I am prevented from ever thinking I was wrong (sc. when I disagree with my former opinions), I can by the same token never think I am right, even about tolerance. And thus if the argument were explicitly based on the rightness of tolerance, it would be self-defeating.

But there are other arguments, and these I shall now

discuss. The first rests on the assertion that it is not a logical principle, that differing assertions about the same subject cannot both be correct. For the purpose of this argument, a logical principle need be only negatively defined as something which relies only on itself for its validity. It is claimed that what I shall for short call the 'disagreement principle' rests on an empirical generalization or observation, and therefore cannot be logical. When we are discussing Hannibal's journey to Italy, my knowledge that I am disagreeing with Jones depends on a piece of very general empirical information, namely that nothing can be in more than one place at the same time. Given this, I reason that if Jones and I are both right, then poor Hannibal must at the same time have been coaxing his elephants over mountain passes, and holding buckets for them in an ocean storm. This one cannot do. (Try it yourself!) Therefore one of us must be wrong. The argument goes on to say that only where reference to some piece of information of this sort is available, can statements be said to disagree; and since ethical propositions are not descriptive of anything, there is no such reference available to them, and they therefore cannot disagree.

There is a temptation at this point to try to save the day for moral propositions by saying that they are

descriptive of something, - of a future event (my doing what I think I ought to do), of my private feelings, or of some assignable characteristics of things or people (Beatrice is 'good' if she behaves in certain ways, apples are good if they are crisp, tart, etc.).* I might here run through the now-familiar criticisms of these contentions, but for the present purpose it would be like pointing out to the man holding a seive for his friend to milk a he-goat, that it is a seive he is holding. I would prefer to ask, is it or is it not an empirical observation, that the same thing cannot be in more than one place at the same time? This again is a question which has enjoyed considerable philosophical airing, as the problem of the "identity of indiscernibles", but since this is a very much wider issue than the present, I feel justified in declining to discuss its deep intricacies, and I hope that what follows may be taken as a sufficient treatment of that part of the question which is important for our purposes.

Is it then, or is it not an empirical observation, that nothing can be at the same time in two places? "It has never been known to happen", you may say. But in

* It may not be that those who expressed these views had any such high-minded motive. One suspects that they are more often attempts to sustain the flagging cause of empiricism, in the face of its chronic inability to render any plausible account of morals.

what way do we know that it has not happened? I am pacing a gravel path when suddenly I am struck by two pebbles, lying side by side, as nearly as I can tell identical in shape, size, colour, weight, and if you like chemical composition and anything else investigation might reveal about them. At last it has happened, say I, for here is an instance of the same thing being in two places at the same time. But no, you say, they are different things. You don't care how like they are, they are not the same thing. But how do you know that they are not? You might say 'They can't be, because they are in different places', but if this did not beg the question, it would at least make it a logical, not an empirical question, whether they were the same thing. But again you might say 'They are different things because they have different histories'. This would make it look like an empirical question of studying the respective pasts of the pebbles. Let's do that then. Suppose we find that until the gardener came this morning and raked the path they were lying over a foot apart, not side by side; and we might perhaps find that they came from different quarries. But this only multiplies the number of times they were in different places, and the number of different places they were in, and contributes nothing to the solution of the problem. But now you say the investigation may not only reveal a different sequence of places, but also that the pebbles

were not always the same. They only became the same this morning, when scraped by the gardener's rake, or ten years ago, when blasted from their respective quarries. But this only adds a further complication to the thing, which itself cannot be empirically settled, namely can things possessing different properties be said to be the same thing? Again you might say that it follows logically that if they are different they are not the same; but again if this is a good argument, it is still a logical, not an empirical resolution of the matter.

Here a fresh sally might be made, to the effect that my very use of words proves the point: I refer to the stones as 'they' and not 'it', as I would do if I thought they were the same thing. But this takes us nowhere, because we are neither of us in any serious doubt about whether 'they' are the same thing. What we are trying to decide is whether this is a bit of empirical knowledge, and if anything, this point affirms that it is not.

The dispute so far has foundered at all points on the definition of sameness, and we might therefore hope to settle it more definitively by trying a little experiment. If we take just one stone there will be no risk of running into any confusion about its self-sameness. Now for the experiment. Set the stone on the table before us, and just

see whether we can get it to be in two places at the same time. Move it an inch to the right, and we find that it has taken up a new place and was no longer where it was. Pick it up and it is now in the hand, not on the table. Divide it in two and it is no longer the same; and each part will yield the same experimental results. Surely there can now be no doubt that it is plain empirical knowledge, that the same thing cannot be in two places at the same time.

But is this an experiment? Have we in any significant sense tried to put the stone in two places at the same time? We have tried to move the stone from place to place, and succeeded. This proves that stones are movable, nothing else. We can say that we have conducted a significant negative-result-yielding experiment only when there are reasons for thinking that what we do will achieve the result we have in mind, if such a result is possible. There are no such reasons here. But suppose we take the stone with both hands, and try with one to move it to one place, and with the other to move it to a different place. Would this not be an appropriate experiment? This if anything will produce the result we have in mind, and if this fails, we have an empirical proof that it is not possible. But would it actually prove anything more than that you can not move a thing by exerting forces in

opposite directions (or some variant of this depending on the strength and direction of the forces exerted)? Or suppose it worked, - would we not then be in the same dilemma we were in when we found the two stones on the path? Are they the same stone, or have we somehow turned one stone into two? - The truth seems to be that we cannot try such an experiment, because we can have no idea what it would be like for the experiment to succeed. I therefore think that this principle, whatever it is, is no empirical observation.

But this does not yet prove what I require to establish, which is that if two people "really disagree" in moral matters, they cannot both be right. One could still say that in its empirical employment, the 'disagreement principle' is derivative from the principle that the same thing cannot be in different places at the same time, and that since this ultimate principle, whether or not it is empirically founded, has obviously only an empirical reference, the derivative principle can similarly only have an empirical reference. But it is not as simple as this. Having an alternative assertion to make is not the only condition under which two people may disagree. One person may simply contradict the other ('Hannibal did not cross the Alps'), and while one's reason for doing this might on occasion be that one thought he went by sea, one might

as properly do it without an alternative view to offer, but rather because one could not believe that anyone could get elephants across the Alps, or because one thought that the evidence for this theory was insufficient or concocted, etc. And one would be disagreeing just as much if one had no reason beyond a dislike for the author of the view, or a natural contentiousness. And even where there is not this direct disagreement, the question whether what is said would imply that a thing is in two places at the same time is not the only way of deciding whether two theories are both tenable, - sometimes people say things which, if they were both true, would imply that a thing both possessed and did not possess a given property at the same time, or that it had a set of properties which were known to be physically incompatible, such as high specific gravity, low muscular power and the ability to fly. I would therefore prefer to say that the primary principle is the one about agreement, and that the one about the same thing being in different places at the same time is a secondary or derivative principle which serves in empirical thought as one of the criteria of whether we are disagreeing. This would dispose of the difficulty about the criteria having empirical references, and leave us free to affirm the 'disagreement principle' in ethics, and find whatever criteria we may, of when we are really disagreeing, and when we are not. What would qualify as

such criteria in ethics? - There would first be cases of direct disagreement, ('You ought/ought not to take candy from children'). In some such cases it might turn out that the author of one of the conflicting assertions did not have the appropriate reasons for saying what he said, and in such an event the disagreement would be after all only apparent. But at least if the conditions for making the relative assertions were fulfilled, there would be 'real disagreement', and not both could be right. And secondly there would be cases where there was not direct contradiction, and here you might expect that the criteria would be as manifold as they are in empirical discourse. One obvious suggestion is that two people disagree morally to the extent that their remarks, if both acted upon by those people upon whom they make claims, would result in one or more persons doing two or more different things at the same time. This principle would require more qualification than it would be worth while to attempt. In a sense one can do two things at the same time, - one can at the same time give money to charity and enhance one's reputation, and one can at the same time listen to music and write philosophy. No doubt you could play a violin standing on your head, juggling grapefruit with your feet, and at the same time discuss the naturalistic fallacy. This kind of difficulty is in

practice partly resolved by the fact that in moral discourse we ordinarily make claims on a man's activities, attitudes, etc., as a whole, or in such a way as to include some things and specifically exclude others, so that although it may be 'physically' possible for a man to do a variety of things at the same time, it is not possible within the terms of the claim we make upon him. And this is not peculiar to moral discourse: if in the example I have been exploiting 'Hannibal' were short for 'Hannibal's army', it would be only if we were talking about the whole army that we could not affirm that it went both by land and by sea. And because of the heavy role played in these matters by the exact nature of what we say, and the endless variety of things we might conceivably say, I can see no prospect of providing anything like a sufficient set of criteria for either empirical or moral discourse. And I think it is for this reason that it is not merely tautologous to talk about disagreement. If we could provide a sufficient set of criteria for when we were "really disagreeing", then the word 'disagreement' would be merely descriptive of cases where the criteria were effective. But since the concept of disagreement is meaningful in itself even in the absence of criteria for it, and since there can be no sufficient criteria, it is more enlightening to talk of disagreement than of its criteria.

I shall now take it that I have deflated any argument to the effect that it is a mistake in morals to accept the principle that if two people "really disagree", at least one of them must be mistaken; but I do not take it that this has any tendency to show that we must adopt it. One is tempted to say that we must, because to do so makes morals intelligible, or because it makes rational discourse in ethics possible. But this has distinct tautological tendencies, because when asked what 'rational discourse' is, what can one reply, save that it is the kind of thing in which, when two people disagree, it is thought that at least one of them must be wrong? And even if this difficulty is overcome, the question remains, why make ethics a thing where rational discourse is possible? And if there is an answer to this appealing to some further principle, this again will have to be justified. We may as well make a stand right at the beginning, saying that we simply choose to adopt this principle, and if anything appending the rhetorical question, why not? And since as I argued, all thinking is 'undertaken', there should be no criticism arising in this quarter.

A parallel account of the way arguments exercise a 'governing' function would, I suppose, include all that I have so far been saying. I argue that if I undertake to use the word 'cat' to refer to beasts like this one, then

I must call this (cat) a 'cat', and I must refrain from calling this (puppy) a 'cat'; and I argue that given certain intentions about the use of the words 'cat' and 'slinky', I cannot say 'All cats are slinky' because of this guileless beast, (or because of all those cats which I must suppose, but have not seen). And the logical inducement we feel to criticise competing theories when our own view is less than certain is similarly an argument. But there are some distinct senses in which the idea of the universality of an argument makes a difference to us. Most of the distinctions between the different kinds of argument rest on the idea that an argument should be universal. I presume there would be no reason to be dissatisfied with a persuasive argument if we did not recognize that it failed to be universal, and that the same recognition is what informs us that an argument for a vague or insufficiently specified conclusion cannot 'really' be an argument, because it holds only for some individual (non-universal) interpretations of the conclusion. Similarly the knowledge that rationalization is a mistake rests on the recognition of an important non-universal element, - my determination to believe, regardless of the success or failure of my arguments. The compulsiveness of the thing may perhaps best be seen from a geometrical example. When we are considering some elementary geometrical proposition,

such as that when parallel straight lines are intersected by a straight line, the angles of intersection are equal, we (in some more-than-visual sense) 'see' that it must be so, and we are torn between the conflicting urges, on the one hand to simply let the matter rest with this dumb, inexplicit knowledge, (who, after all, could doubt the proposition? - what need is there to prove it?), and the equally strong insistence that we do not have an argument, that the matter remains unproven. When I, an unpracticed geometrician, return to such problems, I feel this anxiety very acutely, and in spite of my insistent conviction of what I am trying to establish, it is often with the greatest difficulty, and always with much annoyance, that I re-discover what I can accept as an argument. When I am in the midst of such throes, I at no point consciously think anything like 'This is not universal, and therefore will not do'; but when I reflect on it afterwards, I can find no other way of accounting for my dissatisfaction with one state of affairs, and satisfaction with the other.

I have been trying to show, not only that universality plays an essential role in our thinking, but what sort of a role it plays. In the case of our use of concepts, universality lies, not in the concepts themselves, but in the fixity of our determination to use them in a certain way; and if there is any sense in talking about true

universality in this connection, it lies either in whether we do carry out such a resolution, or in whether it is possible, or makes sense to do so in any particular case. I have pointed out that where there is not this fixity of intention we cannot be said to be significantly using words, and we cannot express any propositions which mean anything determinate, and thus none which have any prospect of being thought true or false. In the case of general propositions, their universality lies in the determination they express to affirm something of a given class of beings which is itself defined by our determination to use a word in a given way, and the truth of such a universal lies in the possibility (in terms of the facts) of so doing. Where the claim of a proposition is less than universal, it cannot be falsified except by a negative universal, and thus we cannot know except through universals; and where the claim is particular ('This cat is black'), it is nothing but an exercise in the use of words in the way we have undertaken to do. (At least this is so for an individual when he is saying this of an animal which he is seeing under good lighting conditions. You might say that it is not the case if in a settled context of usages I inform someone else of the colour of the animal. But communication is a different thing from knowing, and it is the latter we are discussing. And again you might say that if I judge a cat to be black under

peculiar lighting conditions when it appears purple, it is not merely an exercise in the use of words. But in this case the judgment is essentially different. It expresses the more complicated opinion that 'if I saw the same animal under white light, it would then possess that appearance to which I have undertaken to give the name "black"'; and it is based, not simply on present observation, but also on past experience of the conjunction between similar lighting conditions and similar colours.)

In the case of the universality of truths, I have shown that we could not claim that anything was true without at the same time claiming that anyone who 'really disagreed' with us was mistaken, and that this claim to universality is fulfilled, we have a true universal, to the extent that we can show that these other people are mistaken, either by the direct method of unmistakeably proving our assertion, or by independently criticising their contentions in such a way as to at least show that ours is the most tenable. And finally in the case of arguments, I have shown that all arguments claim universality; and they succeed - what can one say? - through conforming to the kind of conditions described in Chapters One and Two.

It is worth pointing out that essentially the same difference as I have been discussing, between claiming

universality and possessing it, is to be seen in the scientific example discussed in the last chapter. The proposition, 'X is the cause of Y' makes a claim, the precise empirical nature of which is determinable by the analysis of the proposition; and this claim is fulfilled, or we have a true universal, when sufficient and appropriate experiments have shown that what it says will be the case, is the case.

I must now ask in which, if any, of these senses we can look for true universals in morals. To attempt an answer to this question verges on doing moral philosophy, rather than discussing the doing of it, and since this is no part of my purpose, I shall content myself with some general points and some examples, which should not be read as in any way purporting to be a full-scale piece of moral theorising.

On the face of it one would say that since the mere adoption of a terminology makes no claim to universality, there is no prospect of discovering any true universals in this direction. It is true that we may make some of the same remarks about moral terminology as about any other use of words, such as that we can logically be expected to have some determinate intentions regarding the use of any word, and to be consistent in the use of it, at least as far as any given intellectual operation

goes, and that where more than one person is involved in a usage, it can be expected that all possible steps should be taken to relieve confusion as to how each is using words. But while such principles may require sterner insistence in moral discourse because of the tendency we have to have secret usages (e.g. when we 'promise'), still they are by no means peculiar to moral talk; and they certainly do not hold forth very broad vistas for philosophical investigation.

The field of universal propositions is likewise unpromising, not because we cannot propose them, nor because we cannot act on them, but because there is no prospect of their claim to universality being fulfilled. If I say 'I should always tell the truth', this is not verified if I actually do so in all possible instances, nor if I firmly intend so to do, nor by the observation of what other people do or think they should do in this connection. If there is any form of verification, it is a generalization from particular cases in which it is known to be the right thing to do, and since these are themselves cases of knowledge, it would be more direct merely to investigate the way it is known in individual cases. People, I suppose, are always under a temptation, when asked for their reason for doing something, to offer a general principle from which the particular case follows logically ('I thought

it right to tell the truth now because I think one should always tell the truth'). But this is hardly a satisfactory answer, because one can always find some general principle under which to subsume any given case, and unless there is some independent reason for subscribing to the general principle, then to say this is no different from telling one's interrogator to mind his own business. And while we do certainly very commonly give voice to general principles, I think they can only be regarded as a desperate device for instructing the young and the backward. I cannot see how an adult could intelligently employ them as a guide to his behaviour, particularly when I consider how many qualifications a conscientious casuist is induced to supply, in order to raise them to what he conceives to be universality.

But we have been looking at these questions in what you might call a material, rather than a logical way, and the latter may be more fruitful. If you ask me why I thought I ought to say 'X' on a certain occasion, suppose I reply 'Because that is what I was thinking, and it would be illogical of me to think one thing, and say something different, just as it is illogical to think all men are mortal, and say Wittgenstein is immortal'. To this it might be objected that there is no logical inference from the fact that one thinks something, to the proposition

that one ought to say it. But there is no logical inference from the fact of my having said 'All men are mortal' and 'Wittgenstein is a man', to the proposition that "I ought to say 'Wittgenstein is mortal'"; and yet if I end by saying Wittgenstein is immortal I would be accused of being illogical. And is it any different if I think the first two propositions, but say the fourth? Unless you have access to my thoughts, you may not know that I am being illogical, but I know, - or at least I do if I can recognize a logical mistake at all. If this is clear enough in the case of thinking the premisses of a syllogism, but saying something different from their conclusion, does it make any important difference if what I am thinking is not a pair of premisses, but merely something contradictory of what I say? If I think 'Wittgenstein is mortal', but say 'Wittgenstein is immortal', it is the same as if I think the two premisses above, but say the contradictory of their conclusion, because to think the premisses is not different from thinking the conclusion. It is therefore not merely an opinion with me that I should here not tell a lie. I know I should not. And the elucidation of this knowledge is what I would call a proper piece of business for moral philosophy. But it would be a mistake to raise the knowledge here contained to a general proposition about truthfulness. It would be necessary first to investigate whether anything could

logically interfere with this connection between thinking something and saying it. Most of us would say that, whether logically or otherwise, this is often necessary, and a philosophical account of the matter could not neglect to investigate the reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with this opinion.

It is much the same if I am asked why I thought it necessary to return this book. Given the appropriate facts, I can only answer 'Because I promised to do so, and it is the logical intention of a promise that it should be kept. My promise was an explicit undertaking to return the book, much more palpable than my undertaking to affirm of each one of your parade of cats, that it is slinky. When I said 'All cats are slinky', in spite of the fact that I did not explicitly undertake to affirm slinkiness of each cat, you felt logically entitled to expect that I should do so. It is even clearer that I must (logically) return the book, because this I have explicitly undertaken'. If you say, 'But it is inconvenient for you to do so, and how do you know that this is not a reason for breaking your promise?', the answer is that it was not part of the terms of the promise, that I should return the book unless it was inconvenient. This is not to say that it could never be - there are no obvious restrictions to the terms in which a promise may

be made. But if in any given instance, convenience was not one of the terms, then it does not provide a reason for breaking it.

It is no accident that some political philosophies have attempted to derive all social duties from the idea of a contract, for a contract is a thing which can quite properly be expected to be universally recognized, since it can be determined logically whether a breach of it exists, and a breach of contract is as abhorrent to the average person as any other logical mistake. Unfortunately we do not make social contracts, and we cannot be expected to keep a promise we have not made.

There is a peculiarly moral use, also, of the logic of 'truth'. If I decline to pay my taxes, I may simply do it, without making any claims about it. But if I do it as the right thing to do, this claim entails that the tax collector is mistaken in his direct disagreement with me.*

* Notice that it is only within a moral context that there can be any rational ethical discussion. We cannot at the same time discuss with a man whether he should concern himself about chemistry, and whether H_2O is the formula of water; and we can similarly not at the same time discuss with people whether they should concern themselves about virtue, and whether being virtuous involves telling the truth. A person must be at least hypothetically willing to be good before we can discuss with him how to go about it. This is therefore the first question to be settled in any first-order moral discussion.

But since my claiming I am right entails but does not prove he is wrong, I am logically bound to criticise his claim on his terms. These happen to be social terms, like 'The government needs money to finance its many functions. It can only get it from its citizens, and it has devised this system for the distribution of the tax load, in the belief that it is equitable'. And so forth. I prefer not to conjecture in detail how the criticism of such an argument might run, but there are a few things about it which it is worth pointing out: (i) Not every criticism would entirely invalidate the tax collector's claim. If, for example, I argued that the system for distributing the tax burden was not in fact equitable, this would not show that I should pay no taxes, because this too would presumably be inequitable. (ii) Some criticisms would involve the rejection of the whole idea of government, but even they would not necessarily acquit me from the duty of paying taxes, for if I chose in spite of this to remain in society, I would at least have to accept government as a fact, and this, depending on my moral principles, might at least induce me to pay taxes in order to relieve the burden of this evil on other people. And again, depending on my moral principles, the rejection of the idea of government might more logically lead to my quitting society than to my declining to pay taxes.

(iii) Some criticisms would be inconsistent with the morality, from the point of view of which the argument began. For example if I argued, not merely that the distribution system was inequitable, but that the whole idea of equity was false, I will not say that this would necessarily be inconsistent with any pretensions to morality, but it certainly might be inconsistent with a given person's moral ideas, and to that extent could not be sustained. But none of this has any tendency to show that it is impossible in such cases for the individual to have the better argument. If he did, or thought he did, I suppose he would just have to decline to pay, and take the consequences. And this is what conscientious objectors, and believers in euthanasia do. I scarcely need point out the difference between such a state of affairs, and simply cheating on one's income tax, dodging the draft, etc., and I think the root of the difference is the logical principle I have been attempting to elucidate. And while the logical dilemma here is amorphous, it is not more so than the perplexity encountered above when we tried to affirm 'All cats are slinky'.

A similar logical affray can be seen in cases of stealing. Consider the following situation. A: 'Don't take that, it's mine.' B at this point may not care whose it is, and take it anyway. But if he regards him-

self as right in taking it, then he disagrees with A, and he may say, 'What do you mean, "mine"?'. A: 'I mean that I have acquired it by the established procedures governing the ownership of goods, and I may now regard as wicked, anyone who seeks to deprive me of it.' At this point B may claim that the procedures have been violated, or he may criticise the procedures themselves. The former line of attack would not ordinarily show that the goods really belonged to B, (although in some cases, as where A purchased a watch from a pawn shop, it might); and the latter would result in a state of affairs very analogous to the tax example - the individual disagreeing with the established social order, - where few arguments would have any tendency to show B's right to the goods in question, and probably all of them would make it reasonable for A to suggest that B go into politics, and until he has achieved his reforms, leave other people's goods alone.

Once again, these remarks could not be elevated into universal injunctions in favor of paying taxes, or against stealing, nor are they intended to lay the groundwork for such generalities. They are intended as examples of the way moral philosophy may explore the logic of moral experience. This is not the logic of the words used in moral discourse, but you might say the logic of thinking about questions like 'Shall I pay my taxes?', 'Should I

steal?', 'tell the truth?', 'keep my promises?', etc. One discovers the logic of these things, not by impartially examining the words used, but by meditating on the way, in ordinary first-order experience, one has gone about thinking through, trying to answer such questions; - by seeking out the typical intellectual crises encountered in such processes, the things which have proved ultimate and decisive, and making clear the rationality which they (perhaps unconsciously) display. It is important, I think, that rationality may, and in a sense even must be unconscious, or at least un-deliberate. One cannot contrive, at least not in any orderly way, to be rational. There are no rules to be followed. It is a natural event, something which just happens, and it is only after the event that one can realize or understand what has occurred. This may be why Kant spoke so fervently of the "sound natural understanding", and why Hegel said that "we must not interfere with the immanent movement of conceptual thought", and that "the owl of Minerva takes its flight after the day is past".

And it is important, too, as explaining the great diversity of interpretation of moral experience. If I feel a very strong impulse, as a rule, to keep a promise, this is to me, as a bit of immediate experience, just that - a very strong impulse, or perhaps a feeling of

convincingness. It is a feeling, and this gives rise to moral sense theories; it is as if a small voice were insistently telling me something, and this gives rise to Conscience theories; it is very convincing, and this gives rise to intuitionist theories; it is a bit like the urge to have a cigarette, and this gives rise to habit theories; and it results in behaviour expressing a concern for other people, and this invites benevolence or utilitarian theories. But all rational thought is originally un-self-conscious. When I was a child squabbling over games of hide-and-seek, I used to get wildly annoyed when if I accused somebody of breaking the rules, he retorted that I did the same myself sometimes. Nobody had told me about the tu quoque, and I was very far from being able to explain that the retort amounted to nothing but changing the subject. I merely experienced an annoyance accompanied by an intense sensation of the propriety of being annoyed; and if at the time I had had any philosophical tendencies, I should probably have explained this as a sense of guilt at my own tendency to cheat at times, or as an intuition that "One should never say 'You do it yourself sometimes'".

The way of philosophising which I have been suggesting is not advanced as the only thing one can do as

moral philosophy. I think that it is within the scope of this method to accomplish most of the things I suggested as goals of philosophy in Chapter One, (though not casuistry or the 'supreme principle' goal), and possibly other things as well. I suspect that what is tenable in the analysis of moral language could also be comprehended in the method, but to sort out this question would be a lengthier process than I would care to undertake at this point, and I shall therefore say that either this is the case, or the analysis of moral language is a separate and subsidiary business, dependent for its definition on the results of investigation as I have described it. I should be happy to allow that such things as moral psychology and moral metaphysics, (the nature of the universe insofar as it makes any difference from a moral point of view), were proper objects of philosophical investigation, but these again, I would say, would be dependent upon knowledge of what sort of a thing morality is, and would not themselves contribute to this knowledge, and ought therefore to be regarded as separate and subsidiary investigations.

I shall briefly review the merits of conceiving moral philosophy in the way I suggest. It is in accord with the highest theoretical standards, since when one is in possession of a logical principle one knows some-

thing, - one does not merely opine or presume. It is a distinctively ethical investigation, since it lays hold on a definite, if limited, form of moral knowledge, and is neither morally non-committal nor covertly morally suspect, as there is some tendency for moral theories to be; and if it is mistaken in the ethical claims it makes, it is at least publicly making them, so that they can be seen and discussed without the air of suspicion, conjecture and embarrassment which surrounds the seeming moral implications of theories which are ostensibly non-committal. It is morally respectable, in that through presenting its conclusions in a discursive or argumentative, rather than an authoritative or obscurantist fashion, it in no way infringes upon the freedom, responsibility or self-respect of the individual. Considered as the heart of an investigation which might also include moral education, moral psychology, moral language, etc., it promises some guidance as to the meaning of the word 'moral' in the names of these studies (and this is what they have commonly lacked most acutely, and never possessed on anything like a philosophically established basis); and finally it is not without prospects of providing practical enlightenment. I have pointed out that no prescriptive rules are available from this kind of investigation; but I think that anyone versed in the logic of moral thinking

is bound to be better equipped to keep moral discourse, both with himself and with others, on a high plane. It is my belief that this cannot fail to have a beneficial effect on practical behaviour. But if I am wrong about this, it can at least be said with assurance that it will make moral discourse less disgusting.